

JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media

Issue 38

June 1993

Source: ejumpcut.org

Jump Cut was founded as a print publication by John Hess, Chuck Kleinhans, and Julia Lesage in Bloomington, Indiana, and published its first issue in 1974. It was conceived as an alternative publication of media criticism—emphasizing left, feminist, and LGBTQ perspectives. It evolved into an online publication in 2001, bringing all its back issues with it.

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Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Children reading the woman in the film

by Mashoed Bailie

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 4-8, 95

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I viewed TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES with ten children, five boys and five girls, ranging from age 5 to 14 in the summer of 1991. The children had all seen the film more than five times; some had seen it ten times. Prior to this viewing, they had constructed meanings of the film through negotiation with each other. They all told me the following interpretation (though the 5 to 7 year-olds were apt to follow the cues of the 8 to 15 age group): the film was about a group of ninja turtles; their mentor, a large rat called Splinter; and their struggle against an evil ninja master called The Shredder. During the time that I gave them to construct their interpretations of the film, not once was the only female character mentioned. I then asked them "How did you feel about April O'Neil?" (the name of the only female character). Their subsequent response raises questions concerning the hegemonic function of women in the text.

The children described April O'Neil (Judith Hoag) as ineffective, weak, and expendable. They reasoned:

"April just sat there when the fighting was going on and all she did was draw pictures and tell the news."

One of the two fourteen-year old girls in the study admitted:

"I'd never really thought about April, but it was dumb because April knew what was going on [she narrates the introduction where we are told about the Shredder's gang of youths who steal from homes and stores in New York City] and yet does nothing about it."

The other teenager further blamed her for giving in to Casey Jones, the male lead in the film who, following a series of abuses, wins April at the film's close.

The children remember the fighting scenes and clearly identify the Splinter and the turtles as "good" and the Shredder and his gang as "evil." However they voice confusion about April's role; not knowing if she is a television news person, a sex object, a mother, a lover, or a girlfriend. Indeed, April fills all of the above roles. Where stereotypical male roles in the film are played by individualized characters, women's roles are condensed into one character, who must embody mother, lover,

employee, and wife.

In the analysis that follows, I argue that April's success in overcoming various obstacles of male domination and aggression (a story which has to be pulled together from the paradigmatic structure of the text) remains narratively concealed behind the recurrent episodes depicting good and evil males struggling for power. For children watching this film, the latter makes up an easy story line. They are building, as David Bordwell has suggested in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, a mental story (fabula) from various plot (syuzhet) devices which, in this film, marginalize O'Neil by denying her participation in what the children perceive as being the main story: the fight between the turtles and the Shredder, between good and evil. Further, the inability of the audience of children to construct the story of April's struggle is largely due to their expectations — not only of the film, but of the hegemonic cultural role of women.

The film opens with a montage sequence of a crime wave which has hit the unprepared victims of New York. We are introduced to the "image" of April O'Neil, a news anchor for television station WTRL 3, as April appears on a television screen on a newsstand on a busy New York street corner among copies of familiar magazines. The image is framed by the television set (within our television set), separating her from "real life."

April O'Neil's voice-over and her image projected across the television screen are powerful, interpretive and omnipresent. She has a voice of authority and, equally important, she calls for accountability from City Hall. However, the power granted her as an employee of the television station, is limited to a specific place and time. The television image confines April to a small square box (we never see her in the studio during her broadcast), a box which we can turn off when we've had enough, or change channels when she is no longer useful. A box, in fact, which can be stolen (as a TV is in the opening sequence).

This first image of O'Neil as a powerful, "official," and knowledgeable news anchor is easily lost as the text progresses. This ideological "forgetting" speaks to the children's interpretive abilities and the confusion I saw the young viewers experience when faced with a condensed version of womanhood. For example, twelve year-old Sarah, when asked about April's image said:

"I guess I don't think much about news reporters. I think the information they give is important but not the news reporters. I didn't even think she was going to be in the rest of the show."

Sarah explained that her impression was that the news reporter would read the introduction to the story and then leave:

"It would have been better if she'd come back at the end to tell us the case had been solved."

O'Neil's image as powerful was also questioned by a reviewer who suggests that while she appears to be an independent woman who pursues an active career and makes her own sexual choices she is, nevertheless, "...a figment, an object of pubescent desire who remains unthreatening and unreal" (Leayman, C. 1990). April's "unthreatening" and "unreal" image in a television monitor plays off against

the older children's interpretation that April has an "important job at the station." While the two oldest girls felt that a television newsperson had an important job, the contradictions fed by later plot developments prevented them from maintaining this image while constructing their early version of the story (fabula).

According to later syuzhet (plot) devices April is far from an independent woman. She is dominated by her boss Charles Pennington (Jay Patterson), physically abused by a young male called Casey Jones (Elias Koteas), whom she describes as "a boy in a man's body" and to whom she is later attracted. She also becomes the object of desire for four pubescent turtles.

For example, April's position as a successful news anchor is suddenly brought into question as the audience is introduced to Charles Pennington (her boss) and his son Danny. The confusion centers around the site for their meeting, April's home. We see Charles Pennington saying,

"Come on, April, you could have called me last night, you know?"

Rather than presenting this encounter as the meeting of employer/ employee, the scene goes out of its way to present a confrontation which looks like a fight between husband and wife. The camera establishes Pennington's relation with April through a mirror shot. April's back is to the camera in an extreme close up, while Charles is seen through the mirror in a medium shot. The boss is angry with April because, on the one hand, she failed to notify him that she'd been attacked by a group of youths the night before and, on the other, because she's not following his directions to "go easy" on the local Chief of Police whom she'd questioned about a gang of thieves robbing the city.

The children viewers voiced confusion about this scene because of the presence of Pennington's son. We see the boy when the scene cuts from the living room where Charles and April argue to the kitchen where Danny sits at the breakfast table. While the older children (the two 14 year-olds) were able to extract the surface structure from the verbal text (Pennington says, "You're my star reporter"), the other eight children missed this cue and considered the scene a mother/ father fight. During their discussion after viewing the film, the children pointed to the discussion between the adults about Danny as part of a family argument:

April: Hey Danny, how's school going?

Danny: [looks up from paper] Fine.

Charles: Oh, wonderful. So wonderful in fact that I have to drive him there every morning now just to make sure he goes. See, that's what he does when he wants to ignore me [Danny places Walkman earphones over his head], sticks his head in those things. I wonder where the hell he got those things anyway?

April: Charles, give the kid a break.

The function of the script and staging here seems designed to compromise April's role as a legitimate employee in the public sphere. Her relation with Pennington has been redefined as one of husband and wife. The boss's dominant position goes

unquestioned by the children viewers. In their interpretation of the pairs, employer/worker and husband/ wife, the children assume a hierarchy in each set of relations. With the plot's introduction of Casey Jones, a failed hockey player-cum-vigilante, further contradictions become apparent. Until now, April has been understood as a news reporter and/or wife and mother.

Casey's presence created for some young viewers an uneasy sense of the potential relation between a prominent, highly intelligent news anchor, and a failed, uneducated macho male. The children's uneasiness may be more heightened since some of them already perceive April as Charles' wife and Danny's mother. What the children failed to comment on was the underlying violence between April and Casey. This violence, which the children interpreted as "Casey just trying to show that he cares," is actually woven throughout the text. April is continually faced with violent reactions to her personality, ability and attitude. All of the main male characters, at one time or another, exhibit violence, overt or covert, against the female lead. Yet none of the following examples, all leading up to the relationship between April and Casey, were construed by the children as being potentially violent in nature:

A) April's boss warns her against pushing the Chief of Police too far:

Charles: "Hey, hey, hey! Look, just take it easy, o.k. [This is said with a threatening voice as Pennington clenches his teeth with a hand reaching toward April's throat, along the Z axis through the mirror and toward the camera]. He's already got the Mayor breathing down my neck!"

The children explained this scene as being representative of

- 1) the way a boss talks to an employee who is not doing what they are supposed to do; it's her fault; or
- 2) the way a husband tries to protect his wife from getting into danger or difficulty when he knows she's going too far.

Again it's her fault. None of the children saw the scene as threatening to April nor an infringement on her personal liberty. Only when I raised the question "Do you think that April should be shouted at like that?" did the children re-evaluate their original statements to say that they would not like to be spoken to in that manner.

B) The Shredder, the arch-enemy of Splinter and the turtles, gets angry at April when he hears her on TV questioning the Chief of Police about the Foot Clan:

Shredder: "Find her. Silence her." [This is an extreme close-up of the back of the Shredder as he thrusts his hand forward, releasing a missile that penetrates the television monitor at April's mouth].

Here, the children were split into two groups. The youngest members, between five and seven years old, said the Shredder was angry at Splinter and the turtles [even though, at this point in the film, Shredder doesn't know they exist]. The older children, after correcting the younger ones' mistake, said that it was not the woman per se with whom Shredder was mad, but that she was getting too close to the truth about the gangs. Their interpretation of this and the two following scenes led to

their conclusion that she ought to follow her boss's advice to "lay off the Chief of Police."

C) In the next scenes, April has just finished interviewing the Chief of Police and is called into his office: "O'Neil, get in here!" Chief Stems' voice is reminiscent of the voice of Fred Flintstone. The camera cuts to a medium close-up of Chief Stems (followed by a series of shot-reverse shots between Stems and O'Neil) and slowly dollies in while he takes off his tie, undoes his top shirt button, and yells:

"Just what did you hope to accomplish out there, besides busting my chops?"

April O'Neil is then seen in close up, apparently enjoying her ability to anger the Chief, followed by Stems' yelling,

"Are you trying to tell me how to do my job?"

The camera cuts to a long shot down the hallway as April skips from the Chief's office smiling. The contrast between the Chief's anger and O'Neil's lighthearted attitude left the children thinking April didn't know "what she was getting into." They perceived her as being rude to the Chief, but they failed to see the contradiction inherent in his demand that she let him do his job while, at the same time, he would define her job for her.

The children have sensed danger in April's continued refusal to "do what she's told" by the chief and by her boss. The danger they have perceived is now realized in the following scene (which, incidentally, takes place following April's interview with the Chief).

D) The camera has cut to an extreme longshot of April standing on the underground platform, where she just missed her train. As the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of April's face, voices are heard in the background. April turns quickly. The scene cuts to a medium shot of a group of men dressed in black and wearing masks. One of the masked gang members tells O'Neil,

"Your mouth may yet bring you much trouble Miss O'Neil."

Again the emphasis on April's "mouth" as the source of all her troubles; The gang member continues: "I deliver a message." We see a medium close up of the ninja as he holds out a clenched fist, slowly opens it to reveal an empty palm, and then violently slaps April's face. Cut to a medium shot of O'Neil as she attempts to fight them off with her handbag. She fails in the effort and is slapped to the ground.

All of these scenes convince the children that April is ineffective in "fighting evil." They succeed in constructing the storyline (fabula) from manifest plot cues related to strength, membership, and gender. They fail to see the latent message of a woman's struggle and defiance against a system that has attacked her on all fronts. Strength, from the children's perspective is the ability to use physical force in overcoming the enemy.

Important to this is membership in some group. Here it means being a turtle, a ninja, or a member of the Establishment. Gender has importance for both group membership and physical strength — since these are bestowed only on male

character here. April's membership in the establishment (as a news reporter) stops when her boss fires her for not following his instructions to "take it easy on the Chief." This leaves her without either "strength" or "membership," and her lack can then be seen as the result of her gender.

E) Casey Jones is the character who informs April that she has lost her legitimizing group membership. During a fight scene at April's antique store (which had belonged to her now dead father) Casey overhears a recorded message from April's boss telling her she's been fired. Later, when April, Casey and the turtles are at a hideout (April's old summer home), Casey informs her carelessly that she no longer has her job. He tells April that she's lucky (the truck has broken down at her dad's old farm and the nearest phone is four miles away) because she won't have to make an eight mile round trip to phone her boss since she's been fired.

April screams, "What did you do? Did you take classes in insensitivity?"

"Hey, I was just trying to break it easy to you," says Casey.

"Oh, well, you failed miserably!" shouts April.

Here the children viewers interpreted April's response as being insensitive. They felt empathy for the Casey character. They said Casey had caused none of April's troubles, and yet she treated him badly for trying to help. Such an interpretation laid the groundwork for why they would interpret another scene as "loving" when it had an underlying violent sexual message embedded within it.

F) The camera has cut to a long shot of April walking out from the house toward the camera along the z-axis. She is looking for a turtle to help her with a plumbing problem in the kitchen. Casey enters the frame from screen right and offers to do the job for her.

"Hey, I am your man. I am mister fix-it."

When April accepts his offer, Casey responds "lead the way toots." April refuses the title and Casey sets about offering substitutes for "toots." His choices are "Babe," "sweetcakes" (pointing handle of hammer toward her breasts), and finally "princess."

When all of these titles are rejected, he cries, "Do you want to throw me a clue? I'm drowning."

Again, the children see Casey here as attempting to be helpful, even charming in his approach. April's response that she wouldn't let him help now if he were the last "thing" on earth, seems to the children an aggressive, although funny, response.

G) The scene, sets up a situation where April has rejected Casey's advances. Her outright rejection is going to be overcome by Casey in the next scene. The camera cuts to a medium shot of Casey sitting in the kitchen chopping food at the table. April walks in rubbing her shoulder; she has attempted to do the plumbing job herself.

As April moves into frame in an extreme close up, she begins to apply ointment to her shoulder. Casey moves up behind her and reaches for her shoulder. April

responds by pushing him away. Casey then grabs her shoulders and violently forces her into the chair. He begins to massage her shoulders, in the process getting extremely close to her breasts. April melts with a slight groan and collapses back into his body, enjoying the experience.

The children read this scene as Casey's apology for not finding the right word to call April in their previous encounter. One of the older girls (S.P.) suggested,

"That's how guys act when they want to make-up with you. They don't know how to show their feelings so they'll grab your shoulder or hit you gently on the back. It just means they're sorry."

None of the children read this scene as suggesting that a woman means "yes" when she says "no." And S.P. refused to accept that the scene suggested that a real man continues to insist even after his initial attempts have been rejected.

The other teenager (P.B.) had a different reading of the scene. Both older girls discussed their views: P.B. said that while she agreed that "that's what guys do..." she didn't believe that it was right.

"I wouldn't let a guy do that to me under any circumstances."

S.P. responded that April was just being overly worried about "women's issues." When I asked what "women's issues" were, she said that

"April was just too worried about what she was being called, she was too protective."

P.B. countered that immediately by asking if S.P. would like to be called "toots" or "sweetcakes." S.P. laughed,

"No, but I wouldn't get so worried about it, she's just over-reacting."

P.B. concluded their brief discussion by saying that she would be angry if any of the guys in her class tried to call her by those names.

"My name is P, and that's what I expect to be called."

S.P. then agreed that she too would rather be called by her name and that those other names would not sound so funny if directed at her.

Interestingly, both girls drew on their own experiences in understanding the scene, interpreting the argument between April and Casey as one between two young people. It seemed to them, that April's character had lost her status as a mature, employed woman, and she had become a young "girl," fighting with a prospective boyfriend. Indeed, April's role seems to have been continuously redefined by the children viewers in terms of her relationship to the male characters in the text.

The plotline continued to emphasize the struggle between a variety of predominantly male institutions in the City. The presentation of this plot line supports unquestioned assumptions about a woman's role in society. While each of the male characters throughout the film has systematically violated April O'Neil sexually, physically or verbally the closing scenes work to reproduce the males

(with the exception of the Shredder who is manifestly evil), as really "good" after all and legitimize their positions in the eyes of the audience.

Following the apparent death of the Shredder, the camera cuts to a medium shot of Danny running toward the site of the final fight scene. As the camera pans to follow Danny's movement, it ends on an extreme close up of the back of April's head. The camera remains fixed on April as she stands in the crowd of on-looker. Danny walks back into the scene saying "April, here." The camera cuts to an extreme close-up of Danny's hand placing a \$20 bill into April's. From the earlier scene, where April and Charles were arguing over Danny, we recall that the boy has stolen \$20 from her purse. In this image are juxtaposed the small, fragile hand of the young Danny against the large hand of April. It suggests a vulnerability in Danny. It is easy to forgive him for his "mistake" and reevaluate him as an honest, trustworthy boy. There is a cut to a long shot of Danny's father as he spies his son in the crowd. An emotional stirring is built by soft sentimental music building in the background. Pennington shouts to his son,

"Danny, Where have you been? I've had the whole city looking for you.
Are you all right?"

Danny hugs his father, insists that he's all right and asserts,

"But dad, my name is Dan now, O.K.?"

Pennington, looking proud and smug, as he tries his son's "new" name on for size:
"Dan ...eh?"

Danny can become "Dan" because he has learned from a mistake; he has returned to April what belonged to her. However, He can do this without the forgiveness of the victim of his crime. April was not aware that "Danny" had stolen her money in the first place. She is confused that the boy should give her \$20 without an explanation. The text works hard to reinvent the character without holding him responsible for his actions or without giving April power to forgive him. In fact, it is Danny's father who gets to forgive his son's acts and to accept "Danny the boy" as "Dan the man."

As April walks away with the boss and his son, the boss has a turn to reinvent himself without much effort:

"April, I told you, there were circumstances. I really need you to cover this."

That's as much as April will receive in explanation for Charles' actions against her: "There were circumstances." The three characters walking together again represents a replay of the earlier "family" scene in April's apartment. Charles is the husband/father figure with control over April and his son. This time, however, he acts like the benevolent husband. April responds,

"I don't know Charles. Did you know that May Williams over at Channel 5 has her own office?"

Charles says "You can have your own office." Charles "gives" April her own corner office and "makes her" one of the highest paid reporters in New York City. He is a

nice guy after all.

With Danny and Charles reinvented, there is only Casey Jones left. April is fixing her makeup in a car mirror in close up as Casey appears at the edge of the screen. April says, "Oh, hi," and Casey walks around and protests,

"Hey, I look like I just called Mike Tyson a sissy, and all you can say is hi?"

The camera cuts to a close up of April's glowing face as she responds with wide, vulnerable eyes:

"What, you don't need an ambulance do you?"

Casey becomes confused, with a "lost little boy" look: "No, but I was..." In an over-the-shoulder shot of April from Casey's perspective, she says "Will you just shut up and kiss me." Casey smiles "I love it when you're pushy." With a broad smile, April moves her head from side to side and then forward to kiss Casey. The ninja turtles in extreme long shot far above from a city building, scream, "All right, April, all right, Casey!" April and Casey embrace.

This last sequence was essentially lost on the youngest viewers. They explained that the important part of the ending was that the Shredder had fallen from the building top into a trashcan where he was crushed. When asked about Charles and Danny, the children agreed that they were really 'good,' and that Danny didn't really mean to take April's money. They said Danny's relationship with his dad was "back to normal," for which they were glad. Two fourteen-year old girls also found the character of Charles Pennington and his son Danny to be redeemed. They suggested that Charles had only been looking out for April because she hadn't realized how dangerous the situation was. Since the danger had now past, it was safe for her to return as a newscaster. They said Charles was especially nice in giving in to her "demand" for more money and an office since she had done nothing to deserve the rewards.

Most of the children didn't like April getting together with Casey at the end — without attempting or being willing to explain why. The two oldest girls went further. They didn't like the Casey Jones character (decided following their discussion about the massage scene) and were annoyed that April would give in to the young man's "obvious" desire:

"You could see that he only wanted one thing, and he wasn't interested in what had happened to April at all" (P.B).

The younger children left following the end of the discussion to play "turtles" in the garden. Interestingly the two older girls remained to continue talking about the film. While the initial response of one of the teenagers (S.P.), was favorable toward Casey and negative toward April, her perspective changed completely over the course of the film and ensuing conversation. The argument between P.B. and S.P, became a negotiation that resulted in S.P. changing her mind about April's attitude toward Casey's advances.

The questions I had asked about the nature of the male "attacks" on April were

integrated into the girls' new perspectives. Following the conversation, S.P. said,

"I'll never be able to watch that film with enjoyment again!"

P.B. agreed and said that many of the questions (which uncovered potential, latent readings about aggression toward the female character) dealt with things she'd missed when she first watched it, but that she believed that they were "really there in the film."

CONCLUSION

While TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES provides children with a manifest story of good and evil struggling for power on the New York streets and in the sewers, it has a latent story which young viewers will become aware of only through a systematic critical analysis. The story of April's exclusion from membership and power because of her gender, resides below the surface structure of the text. The dominant plot line continually provides information used by the children to build their own fabula (storyline) about good and evil male institutions that struggle for power. The result is that the children leave the text "feeling" that they really didn't like April very much but not knowing why. The younger children tend to focus attention on the fighting scenes and explain away their dislike for April as due to her inability to fight. The older children, after being asked systematically to isolate and analyze the situations in which April is placed, come to see their anger at April as deriving from the aggression aimed at her by the other characters. Both of the oldest teenagers concluded that they were angry because April didn't do what they would have wanted her to do, or what they would have wanted to do under the same circumstances.

Texts such as TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES have the potential, if used critically, for providing children with popular cultural material from which to become aware of stereotypical relations that they generally do not notice. By encouraging young people to engage the popular texts and relate them to the texts of their own ongoing lives, it is possible to heighten their awareness about discriminatory actions and assumptions and to provide them with the tools for overcoming their own misconceptions about gender, race, and power.

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The Abyss Like a fish out of water

by Jody Lyle

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 9-13

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Everywhere water. Peaceful water. Then suddenly, out of the limitless blue, comes a long, gray U.S. submarine. Quick cut to inside the vessel to find an exclusively male group of seamen trying to identify an object approaching at an unheard of speed. "I'll tell you what it's not, it's not one of ours," an officer shouts, doing his best to identify the approaching object. Suddenly the sub loses power and rocks violently in the wake of the passing "other." Unable to regain control in time, the submarine collides with a sheer rock face and is destroyed. There are no survivors.

Welcome to James Cameron's world of *THE ABYSS* (1989). Unlike the male-dominated beginning of the film, the characters' gender identities remain as fluid as the surrounding substance in which the film takes place. Written and directed by a man, James Cameron, but produced by a woman, Gale Anne Hurd, *THE ABYSS* is an interesting text to discuss issues of gendered authorship. The film does not present a balanced picture of male and female characters just because each sex has had its representation in the production process. Indeed, *THE ABYSS* seems to favor a feminist, or at least progressive, perspective. Battling preconceived notions of sexual power, the film characterizes certain male characters as "feminine" and certain female characters as "masculine." These fluid boundaries engulf conventional patriarchal structures and ultimately dilute the power of unaccommodating male figures in the film.

THE ABYSS revolves around the search for the U.S.S. *Montana*, the nuclear submarine that sinks in the film's opening sequence. Recruited to assist in the search is the crew of an underwater oil rig, led by Bud Brigman (Ed Harris). The U.S. Navy sends down four Navy Seals, commanded by Lt. Coffey (Michael Biehn), to direct the search. Lindsay Brigman (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio), the designer of the rig and Bud's estranged wife, accompanies the Seals. When Lindsay arrives on the rig, she and Bud renew their marriage battle. As the search progresses, Lindsay sights an unidentified object, which the crew labels Non-Terrestrial Intelligence (NTI).

Believing that the NTI is really a Russian submersible, Coffey and the Seals secretly enter Phase Two of Operation Salvo: retrieving one warhead from the sub to destroy the threat. The crew discovers Coffey's intention, but only after the

warhead is dropped into the abyss where the NTI are believed to be living. Bud, breathing oxygenated liquid to protect his lungs from the pressure at great depths, descends into the abyss to disarm the warhead. The film concludes when the NTIs rescue Bud and the crew on the rig by lifting them to the surface and allowing for the reunification of the couple: Bud and Lindsay.

At the time of the film's release, reviews of *THE ABYSS* took three separate shapes. First came the uninspired reviews about the film's action/adventure potential. *Newsweek* characterized it as "thrilling, dumb and irresistible"[1][[open notes in new window](#)] and *Theatre Crafts* proclaimed it a "repeat of [Cameron's] formula for success [with] monsters in the ocean instead of on land or in outer space." [2] Most biting, however, *Time* moaned that "one is pining for a rubber shark or a plastic octopus — anything, in fact, out of a good old low-tech thriller." [3] Second, many reviewers chose to focus on the interesting relationship between James Cameron and Gale Ann Hurd. Having worked on *THE TERMINATOR* and *ALIENS* as husband and wife, Cameron and Hurd were newly divorced during *THE ABYSS*' production. Reviewers could not resist hypothesizing about the connections between Operation Salvo, Bud and Lindsay's rocky marriage and the ex-spouses. [4] Finally, the third method of review focused on Gale Ann Hurd alone.

Marjorie Rosen, in her article "The Hurd Instinct" in *Ms.*, traces Hurd's career and her personal quest to find "a brand new kind of action heroine." [5] Rosen points to Sarah Conner in *THE TERMINATOR*, Ripley in *ALIENS*, and to Lindsay in *THE ABYSS* as manifestations of this "new heroine" and concludes that

"certainly none has made the splash that Hurd has in the emphatically male-dominated action-movie arena."

Rosen's approach functions as subverted auteurism, elevating the producer to this "revered" film post.

What Rosen fails to prove, however, is that Hurd actually possesses a power over the images of the film. Can Hurd be responsible for a feminist slant while a male director calls the shots? [6] As with many explicatory criticisms in the past, Rosen accepts Hurd's intention to create a "new heroine" without probing deeper than surface level. In fact, there is not one serious, symptomatic criticism of this film. Writers, so far, have hesitated in taking the leap into the abyss to adequately discuss what this complicated text says about issues of the Cold War, patriarchy and gender.

THE ABYSS' characters have missions defined by an outdated Cold War mentality. Everything is officially explained in terms of "us vs. them," setting the stage for a world always divided in two. In the opening sequence when the officer says, "It's not one of ours," we realize that this group defines things in relation to themselves. They can only tell us if some "other" belongs or does not belong to their group.

In his book *Male Fantasies*, Klaus Theweleit investigates the insecurities in the Freikorps literature that preceded Nazi Germany. [7] By studying the poems and letters of these "soldier males," Theweleit attempts to illuminate the "male type who finds life without war and weapons unimaginable" (p. 24). Navy Seal Lt. Coffey exhibits many characteristics of Theweleit's soldier male. Coffey exists according to the structures of the rigid world of the military. He follows its rules

and regulations religiously. In return, the institution gives him power through rank. Coffey is in charge of Operation Salvo and clearly enjoys his control. As he briefs the rig crew on how Operation Salvo will proceed, Coffey uses his maps and charts as symbols of his authority and relishes his ability to take charge. Closing the session, he barks:

"I want everyone ready to get wet in fifteen minutes."

Coffey would not possess such power without the military. As a result, Coffey perpetuates a Cold War mentality to protect his power and control.

In the film, this Cold War mentality moves beyond the arms race between the U.S. and the Soviet Union to affect gender issues. The primary threat to Theweleit's man is Woman. Lindsay is a strong woman with many "masculine" traits. She is independent, determined, abrasive and involved in an industry frequently assumed to be male-dominated: oil. To undermine this strength, Cameron immediately introduces Lindsay as non-male and stereotypically weak. Stepping off a helicopter, we first see one male boot, then another, and then Lindsay's leg in pantyhose and a pump. Cameron attempts to harness Lindsay's power by keeping her "feminine," but his image of her is inconsistent. After characterizing Lindsay as non-threatening, he later finds her connection with Nature, especially water, very threatening.

Theweleit stresses that women were considered to exude

"peaceable, life-affirming traits that were acquired by humans in [an] aquatic era" (p. 292).

Such a connection between woman/ nature/ water/ peace proves very important in *THE ABYSS*. The water is Lindsay's domain. It is the place of her work, her community and her love-life. Although she and the crew have their differences, there is a bond of friendship and loyalty that empowers them as a group. When Coffey descends into such a "peaceable, life-affirming" environment, his power diminishes. This is portrayed in Coffey's inability to physically endure the water pressure.

Immediately following his arrival onto the rig, Coffey shows signs of pressure-induced psychosis. He notices his hands shaking when he arrives on the rig, which, as Lindsay explains, is one symptom. Quickly losing his reasoning capabilities, Coffey takes drastic action to remain conscious by slicing his arm with a knife. Thus, while Lindsay acclimates to the deep-water environment, Coffey loses control. Lindsay's association with nature continues when, at the beginning of the film, a man on the Explorer (the boat on the surface) communicates to Bud down on the rig that Hurricane Frederick is headed their way. Bud replies: "I think hurricanes should be named after women, don't you?" At this moment the man's papers blow off his desk as the camera glances over to see Lindsay in the doorway. Here, Lindsay is visually connected with a powerful natural force that disturbs the male world. Thus, to Coffey, she is the ultimate threat.

The relation between Lindsay and Lt. Coffey is driven by Lindsay's protective instincts and Coffey's insecurities. As the designer of the rig, Lindsay assumes a mothering and protective role when Coffey threatens her domain. She refuses to let

him destroy her work and community with his paranoid beliefs. When she learns that he has brought a nuclear warhead onto her rig, she storms into his quarters. As Coffey tries to conceal the table behind him, Lindsay reaches around to remove the cloth he has hiding the warhead.

Theweleit describes his soldier male's defense mechanisms:

"the eternally stilted, cool, formal conduct; the ceremoniousness; the stiff distancing even from 'good' women — all could be seen as manifestations of the attempt to ward off castration" (p. 198).

Coffey's defenses obviously break down in competition with Lindsay, for her assault on Coffey's warhead is exactly that, castrating. Coffey glares at Lindsay and says:

"You are becoming a serious impediment to our mission."

This statement throws us back into the "us vs. them" mindset, but this time the "us" of which Coffey speaks is men, not the United States. Lindsay is not a threat to U.S. security, but a threat to Coffey's male identity. Resenting her opposition, Coffey tries to control both Lindsay's identity and her actions.

Repeatedly throughout the film Coffey refers to Lindsay as "Mrs. Brigman" to which she clearly objects. Aside from just irritating Lindsay, Coffey uses this title to deny Lindsay's autonomy. It is comforting for him to pull Lindsay's identity into the realm of patriarchal marriage. In response to Lindsay's actions, particularly her threat of castration, Coffey flaunts his power in the form of sexual assault. Coffey shoves Lindsay up against a wall and says: "This is something I've wanted to do since we first met." We see Coffey's hands go off-screen below his waist as we hear what seem to be two zippers opening. We quickly learn that it was the sound of ripping tape which Coffey uses to cover Lindsay's mouth. Of course, the rape reference is clear. Cameron, in his tight shot which excludes the lieutenant's hands, seems to enjoy the momentary power of man over woman. This liberating moment for paranoid males ends, but it still leaves behind the uncomfortable feeling that Coffey is capable of victimizing Lindsay. Finally, Lindsay does prevail. Battling in submersible vehicles, Lindsay succeeds in pushing Coffey's broken vessel over into the abyss where that submersible and Coffey himself implode from the pressure.

Lindsay is not the only threat to Coffey's world. The NTI, or aliens, are just as harmful. Each alien takes a different form. Lindsay encounters a small phallic alien and a larger disc-shaped one, whereas Bud and Jammer (a member of the crew) see bird-like creatures. Every alien, however, has a neon glow. After Lindsay meets the alien outside the rig, she tries to convince the crew that what she saw was not "man-made." She tells Bud:

"It wasn't clunky, it was the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. It was a machine, but it was a dance of light."

Lindsay sets the alien apart from the "clunkiness" of "our" submarines. Despite these descriptions, Coffey is convinced that the alien is really a Russian invention and therefore a threat. We learn, as the film progresses, that it was the NTI who caused the U.S.S. Montana to crash. What the spectator wonders, however, is did

the alien approach the sub with the intention of destruction?

We learn to trust the aliens since they save Bud, Lindsay and the crew. But should we take the kindness as applicable to all humans or only to the ones who challenge a world based on war? Evidence suggests the latter. In a brilliant show of special effects, an alien enters the rig as a tube of water. The spectator occupies the subjective viewpoint of the creature as it winds its way through the corridors and meets the crew. The meeting is one of mutual inquisitiveness and bonding between the crew and the alien. Unfortunately, during these tender moments, Coffey who is separate from the group, sees the phallic tube of water extending out of the Moon-pool and shuts the door to the hallway that the tube has traveled down. This castrating action destroys the alien. The crew is splashed in water as the severed tube falls to the floor, while the alien's base, in the Moon-pool, rears back and retreats into the sea.

Remembering Theweleit and the soldier male's defenses against castration, we could say that Coffey inflicts on his enemy what he is most fearful of. Finally, since they cut off electrical power whenever they appear, the aliens are a threat to Coffey's ability to make war. All lights, communication systems and power for propelling submersibles fail when an alien approaches. Therefore, the aliens threaten Coffey's power both literally, through electricity, and figuratively, in their friendly relations with Coffey's opposition: Bud, Lindsay and the crew.

Through the fact that both Lindsay and the alien threaten Coffey, they are connected. Each one's "otherness" challenges the world that Coffey strives to protect. Linda Williams, in her essay "When the Woman Looks," explores the role of woman in the horror genre and specifically the moment when the heroine and the monster look at each other.[8] Williams states that it is in this moment that the heroine's

"look at the monster recognizes their similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing" (p. 85).

Lindsay and the alien experience this recognition in their meeting when Lindsay goes outside to retrieve extra oxygen tanks. As she works, her light goes out and she loses contact with the crew inside. By now we know what this means. The small alien appears behind Lindsay and as she turns toward it, we watch her from the subjective position of the alien. Soon this alien swims away and, from the abyss, a huge alien slowly rises. Lindsay and the creature look at each other in two pairs of shot-reverse shots. This sustained looking without dialogue offers a definite break to the fast-paced tempo the film has exhibited so far. The look establishes the peaceful nature of the two participants and thus their shared difference to the patriarchal structure Coffey upholds.

The looking scene goes further to include a touch. Lindsay reaches out to the alien and we see the touch in a close up. This touch, like the look, characterizes the two as compassionate, for as Lindsay slowly caresses the alien's surface, she smiles and the creature does not swim away.

Furthermore, the touch provides another difference from Coffey. Theweleit points to the soldier male's

"fear that bodily contact produces a lightning flash, a body blow" (p. 42).

Thus the soldier male fears touch in its association with physical harm. Indeed, Coffey does not touch anyone throughout the film except in acts of violence. Ultimately, the look suggests more than a simple connection between Lindsay and the alien, it constitutes an identification between the two, as Williams' argument suggests. This provides the motive for Lindsay's continued defense of the aliens throughout the film. After this experience, Lindsay returns to the rig and, battling Bud's skepticism, says:

"We all see what we want to see. Coffey looks and sees Russians. He sees hate and fear. You have to look with better eyes than that."

Lindsay's plea to "look with better eyes" is meant to correct the unaccommodating gazes on herself, as a woman, as well as those on the alien.

THE ABYSS stretches Williams' thesis to include men as well as women. Bud has a scene of looking and touching with the alien, which is almost identical in shot structure to Lindsay's scene. The alien comes upon Bud as he is lying next to the disarmed warhead waiting to die. Again, we occupy the subjective viewpoint of the alien, which is followed by two pairs of shot-reverse shots. This time it is the alien who reaches out to touch. As the two clasp hands, the alien pulls Bud up into its ship to safety. Bud is different from Theweleit's men who

"look for ecstasy not in embraces, but in explosions" (p. 41).

He, like Lindsay, does not fear the touch or the embrace of another being. Therefore, in contrast to Coffey's masculinity, Bud appears feminine. This feminization occurs in Bud's transformation from disbelief to belief in the aliens. His ability to accommodate an "other" establishes a connection not only between Bud and the aliens, but also between Bud and Lindsay.

The film emphasizes the bonds between Bud, Lindsay and the alien in the scene when the alien visits the rig. Lindsay is the first of the sleeping crew to awaken and see the tube of water extending into the cabin. She calls out to Bud and then to One Night (a member of the crew). The initial fear that the crew experiences is soon alleviated by the friendly, playful nature of the visit. As Lindsay and Bud stand directly opposite the alien, it takes the form of their faces one at a time. These mirror-like reflections resemble sculptures made with water. Lindsay smiles at the alien's game and its image of her smiles back. Turning again to Williams' argument about the look, we find that

"the monster is one of many mirrors held up to [the woman] by patriarchy [and] she also encounters in this mirror at least the possibility of a power located in her very difference from the male" (p. 96).

THE ABYSS, in a very literal way, uses the monster/alien as a mirror for the woman. But as I have argued, the film also holds this mirror up to certain men. Bud and Lindsay prove their difference from Coffey's world of hate and fear and, as a result, find a power that is feminine.

This female power saturates the film through the film's sustained elaboration of the theme of childbirth. Most of the action takes place in womb-like spaces: the rig, the submersibles and the body suits. Symbolic umbilical cords are also prevalent. The Explorer on the surface is connected to the rig by a huge cable; Bud and Jammer are connected inside the submarine with a red rope; and Lindsay is connected to the rig when she walks outside in her suit.

The most obvious birth reference, however, is the breathing of the oxygenated fluorocarbon liquid emulsion. In the dramatic scene where Bud must breathe this liquid to travel down into the abyss, the Navy Seal, who is sympathetic to the crew's plan, coaches him by saying:

"We all breathe liquid for nine months, Bud. Your body will remember."

Here the strength of the mother-child bond appears. Bud becomes the child who seeks the peaceful protection the womb and its liquid provide in order to disarm the warhead. This childbirth connection with Bud also extends to other instances in which Bud occupies the parent position. When Bud and Lindsay find themselves trapped in a leaking cab with only one body suit, Lindsay drowns. Bud carries her body back to the rig. The crew attempts to resuscitate her but with no success. Unwilling to accept defeat, Bud renews the effort, and Lindsay eventually regains consciousness. In reality, Bud plays a maternal role by giving Lindsay life after she had returned, symbolically, to the womb by breathing water. Revival happens again at the end of the film when the aliens lift the rig up to the surface. It is another rebirth, at the hands of Bud (since we know he is behind the rescue), this time for the whole crew including Lindsay. The push from the ocean womb into the open air gives the crew a new beginning.[9]

The film ends, in familiar Hollywood fashion, by reconstituting the couple. After Lindsay emerges from the rig, she sees Bud emerging from the alien ship. Lindsay goes to him. Recalling the previous scenes with the alien, Lindsay and Bud first look at and then touch each other's faces. The last shot of the film looks down on the couple kissing. I want to resist the common feminist complaint that the woman, after an entire film of independence, is simply recuperated into male patriarchy. For with Bud's connection to the alien, to childbirth (both as child and mother) and to Lindsay herself, Lindsay enters a "feminized" male world. The film consistently empowers the "others" in patriarchal society: women, feminized men and non-humans. Presenting the horrific possibility of a mad male world, *THE ABYSS* posits an alternative that is both peaceful and progressive.

But there is a rather haunting, unsettling aspect to Cameron's ending, as well, in the return to the surface. Working within fantasy, Cameron's films are set in "unreal" places like outer space or the ocean floor. Underwater, *THE ABYSS* promotes peaceful feminism, but as we decompress and reach the surface the unbelievability of the conclusion undermines this progressive tone. The final shots of the huge alien ship emerging from the water into "real" space, ironically appear less believable than the rest of the film which had taken place in an "unreal" space. Perhaps it is only an unreal space which accommodates female empowerment. Once the characters leave the water, the utopian possibilities vanish. Lindsay's connection to Nature, Bud's feminization, and Coffey's powerlessness all required water and submersion. The ocean setting facilitates the transference of power from

warriors to "life-affirming" people. Thus, as Lindsay and Bud reunite in a new non-patriarchal structure, the spectator recognizes that they are out of their environment. The gender fluidity that has occurred underwater is now like a fish out of water. We can only wonder how long it will last.

NOTES

1. Ansen, David. "Under Fire, Underwater." *Newsweek* (August 14, 1989) v. 114, page 56.
2. Calhoun, John. "The Abyss." *Theatre Crafts* (August 15, 1989) v. 23, page 44.
3. Schickel, Richard. "Water Bomb." *Time* (August 14, 1989) v. 134, page 79.
4. Rafferty, Terrence. "The Current Cinema: Dead in the Water." *The New Yorker* (September 4, 1989) v. 65, page 89-90.
5. Rosen, Marjorie. "The Hurd Instinct." *Ms. Magazine* (September, 1989) v. 18, page 66-71.
6. This idea of gendered authorship is a separate study in itself. I feel it is necessary to mention, however, since previous reviews of the film have stagnated on the creative team of Cameron and Hurd and the completion of their third feature together. My article's focus is on textual issues in THE ABYSS.
7. Theweleit, Klaus. *Male Fantasies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
8. Williams, Linda. "When the Woman Looks." in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams, eds., *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, The American Film Institute Monograph Series, Vol. 3, Fredrick MD: University Publications of America, 1984. Pages 83-99.
9. I only point to this parenting role for Bud in the most general way to introduce the idea of matriarchy. I recognize that the focus on Bud's role as a "mother" risks an incestuous reading in the reunion of Bud and Lindsay.

Hidden Agenda. JFK Conspiracy thrillers

by Jerry White

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 14-18

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Mainstream films which focus on governmental conspiracies have a value in making viewers question mainstream assumptions about people in power. But often times these films have their political cake and eat it too. Two recent examples of conspiracy thrillers are the U.K.'s *HIDDEN AGENDA* (Ken Loach, 1990) and the U.S. feature *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991). Both films level serious charges against their respective governments, suggesting governmental complicity in political conspiracies (a term that both films make heavy use of). But neither film attempts at a serious institutional analysis, indicated by the way both use as characters mainstream authority figures crusading for justice. These feature fictions seem to be, in Hannah Arendt's terms, rebellious films which want to pass themselves off as acts of revolution.

HIDDEN AGENDA deals with the special section of England's military known as M15. The film begins with the assassination of a U.S. human-rights lawyer, whose organization is critical of the English actions in Northern Ireland, and his IRA-affiliated friend. Both were on their way to meet a member of the IRA right outside Belfast. The U.S. lawyer was carrying a tape which would incriminate high-level members of the Thatcher administration. The two were killed by the M15 forces. A cover up has followed.

An outside investigator is brought in, fiercely independent. This, of course, raises the ire of the local police chief, who sets obstacles along every inch of the British investigator's path. The British investigator joins up with the U.S. lawyer's wife, who works as a lawyer with the same human rights organization that her husband did. When the investigator discovers that the assassination has implications that date back to the Thatcher administration's destabilization of the Labor party in the late 70s, high-level officials begin to block his path. He is ultimately defeated. The U.S. lawyer perseveres, however. She manages to get a copy of the incriminating tape, which she promises to try to make public.

The crux of this film is the accusation that the Thatcher administration engaged in dirty tricks to damage the Labor party and win control of the country. The title *HIDDEN AGENDA* refers to the real reasons for subsequent crackdowns in Northern Ireland. This film shows British military action in Northern Ireland as the Conservatives' way of asserting authority in a country they sensed was coming

apart at the seams. M15 was given carte blanche in Northern Ireland, arresting, torturing and killing whomever they pleased, confident that no questions would be asked. Their tactics were an extension of the destabilizing efforts used against the Labor party. By creating a sense of domestic unrest, the Conservatives were able to justify their authoritarian policy on Northern Ireland.

HIDDEN AGENDA problematically fails to engage in substantial institutional analysis. For example, Loach never wonders what might have happened in Northern Ireland if the Labor party had remained in power. His quarrel is with the Conservatives, who serve quite well as the "bad guys" in this intrigue, and not with British imperialism as a distinct social structure. He sees the assassination of the U.S. lawyer as part of a huge, at times very confusing, conspiracy. The Conservative party's actions are identified specifically as a "conspiracy" throughout the film. Michael Albeit writes:

"the conspiracy approach is beside the point for understanding the cause of political assassinations.., it is a sports fan's or voyeur's view of complex circumstances" (18).

Loach's film provides an excellent example of this methodology. He directs his wrath at one specific group of individuals, not at the corrupt political system that created them. HIDDEN AGENDA has a structure which leads viewers to believe that solely because the Conservatives are power hungry and ruthless, does the British government authorize such heinous actions. These actions are not placed in the historical context of British imperialism, which the situation in Northern Ireland derives from. The film can only speak in simplistic formulas. The Conservatives are clearly the bad guys, the lawyers and the investigator are the good guys, and their IRA contacts are somewhere in between.

The investigator's clear role as the protagonist is the film's most problematic aspect. What Loach does with this character is validate the system that he's trying to criticize. Much like the heroic FBI agents of MISSISSIPPI BURNING, the investigator of HIDDEN AGENDA gives the impression that authority structures can be constructive, given good people to participate in them. The narrative places the focus on the individual and not on the institution that he is a part of. When the British investigator first joins forces with the surviving U.S. lawyer to get to the bottom of the assassination, the investigator claims that he "doesn't care whose toes I step on." She later confirms her favorable impression when she tells a friend that he can be trusted, that "he's different." This notion of the heroic authority figure suggests that a strong willed English guy in a position of power is what's needed to fix the problem that is Northern Ireland. Recognizing the oppressive power structure would more likely lead to lasting change, yet this investigator belongs to that power structure and functions within its hierarchy.

But HIDDEN AGENDA does not ask viewers to replace the system it criticizes but to be patient and hope that democracy will correct itself. The film misses this aspiration's paradox. As Albeit writes, conspiracy theories allow people to believe that "the government and law per se are okay. We need only to get rid of the bad apples" (19). In that way, conspiracy thriller films can never lead to lasting social change. HIDDEN AGENDA's heroic investigator affirms his belief in conspiracy theories. He clearly identifies the Conservative party as the "bad apples," rather than check the roots of the apple tree for signs of disease.

What HIDDEN AGENDA advocates is a rebellion, as Hannah Arendt defines the term. Of classical rebellions, she writes:

"The aim of such rebellions was not a challenge of authority or the established order... it was always a matter of exchanging the person who happened to be in authority" (40).

HIDDEN AGENDA merely suggests that the wrong people are in power, not that the power they wield is in itself corrupt. HIDDEN AGENDA's focus on the specific makeup of the ruling class is exactly what Arendt identifies as being wrong with rebellions. We do not need a different ruling class or to "exchange the person who happens to be in authority." We need to recognize the problems that such authority by definition creates.

Oliver Stone's film JFK also makes serious allegations against a government it ends up vindicating. As the film chronicles the assassination of John F. Kennedy, it presents a conspiracy theory that implicates rogue elements in the government's highest levels. The film has as protagonist the heroic figure of Jim Garrison, determined to bring the conspiracy to light. Like the investigator of HIDDEN AGENDA, he claims he doesn't care whose toes he steps on in his idealistic pursuit of the truth. "Let justice be done, though the heavens fall," he says to a crowd of skeptical reporters. Garrison finally manages to bring Clay Shaw, a figure tangentially related to the assassination at best, to trial for conspiracy to kill the President. After Garrison loses, he takes solace in the fact that he has at least raised doubts about the Warren Commission's report.

Stone's quest to discredit the Warren Commission's report is a worthwhile one. Few people still believe the official account of the assassination, which placed Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone killer. The report's flaws were too numerous: the missing brain, the destroyed autopsy notes, the failure to account for much of the action in Abe Zapruder's accidental filming of the assassination, and most of all the "magic bullet" theory. Stone's frontal assault on the Commission's report represents a legitimate effort to expose the lies and distortions that our government routinely engages in. The film has had tangible effects, to say the least. Because of the public outrage created by the film, most of the documentation on the assassination is about to be declassified. Not even the 1977 House Select Committee on Assassinations could manage that. The film has made the public question the official story and accept the fact that our government will engage in incredible deception when threatened. JFK has without a doubt had a positive effect on the current U.S. political climate. Nonetheless, the film has serious problems in the way it represents efforts towards social change.

First, the President of JFK bears little resemblance to John Kennedy, President in 1963. This distortion of history is apparent in the first five minutes in the film. In the film's opening sequence, Stone gives the viewer a quick history lesson to set the foreign and domestic context of the film. "Kennedy found himself embroiled in conflicts in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam," the narrator says over newsreel footage. He does not say, however, how Kennedy got "embroiled" in these conflicts. The narrator's voice fails to note that Kennedy invaded these countries, that these were conflicts of his own imagining. The notion that John Kennedy was too progressive for the military-industrial complex does not rest well alongside the

facts of his foreign policy. Alexander Cockburn notes,

"the real JFK presided over a vast military build-up, backed a military coup in Guatemala to keep out Arevalo, denied the Dominican Republic the possibility of land reform, helped promote a devastating cycle of Latin American history... and backed a Ba'ath coup in Iraq that set a certain native of Takrit on the path to power" (24).

Like *HIDDEN AGENDA*, JFK indulges in a simplistic, conspiracy-based analysis of the assassination. The film puts forth the theory that Kennedy was too much of a reformer for the military industrial complex to handle. They had to rub him out, lest he end the war in Vietnam and take steps toward nuclear disarmament and normalization of relations with Cuba. According to the film, "rogue elements" in top levels of the government, mostly in the military and the CIA, plotted to kill him and cover it up. This image of "rogue elements" suggests the possibility of a positive version of the CIA or the military, given better people to participate in these organizations. Such an "honorable" person is presented in the form of Colonel X, Garrison's contact inside the Pentagon. Stone never discusses how the very nature of the military and intelligence agencies in the U.S. government contribute to their violent, right wing mind set, only that in this case they did heinous wrong. Stone, like Loach, presents a binary conflict wherein bad government officials, solely because they are bad, go after good government officials, who will be stopped solely because they are good. While the film makes reference to the influence and power of the "military industrial complex," it fails to analyze what has structured our social order to irreparably link industry with the military. Because of the awesome economic benefits of war making, the two institutions will always function together under capitalism, no matter who is President. JFK tries to deny this structural economic and political reality with its portrayal of a heroic, rebellious President.

Albert writes that conspiracy theories "imply that all was once well and that it can be okay again, if only the conspirators can be dealt with" (19). Stone longs for the days when the good guys were in power, and his film tries to mobilize the public into identifying the bad guys in order to rectify the situation. What Stone fails to realize is, as Billy Joel put it, "the good old days weren't all that good." He certainly doesn't try to explain history with an economic, political, and institutional analysis.

Stone's use of strong male authority figures as heroes further illustrates the film's limits for encouraging meaningful social change. Stone wants everyone to follow him Garrison, a white male, the New Orleans D.A. thoroughly entrenched in the mainstream power system. Garrison is following the memory of Kennedy, another white male thoroughly entrenched in the mainstream hierarchy of power. As Arendt writes about this kind of power,

"While the people might be admitted to have the right to decide who should *not* rule them, they certainly were not supposed to determine who *should*, and even less do we ever hear of a right of people to be their own rulers or appoint persons from their own rank for the business of government" (40, emphasis hers).

A progressive film would not lament the loss of a "good" ruler but analyze the oppression involved in being ruled. Nor would a progressive film ask the viewer to

believe in the heroic role of a single individual. Such a film would understand the dangers of citizens' being content with being ruled or lead by some glorified individual. Stone does not have a problem with such dangers per se, only with the specific people who embody them.

An image used throughout JFK is the "coup d'etat." Garrison claims that this is what Kennedy's assassination amounted to. Ironically, this image solidifies the rebellious is opposed to revolutionary outlook of the film. As Arendt writes,

"Coups d'etat and palace revolutions, where power changes from one man to another, from one clique to another..., have been less feared because the change they bring is circumscribed to the sphere of government and carries a minimum of unquiet to the people at large" (34-35).

If Kennedy had remained President, would there have been noticeable change in the lives of "the people at large"? Cockburn writes ironically, "whether JFK was killed by a lone assassin or by a conspiracy has about as much to do with the subsequent contours of U.S. politics as if he had tripped over one of Caroline's dolls and broken his neck" (22). Kennedy's policies and their effects on the general public derived more from institutional and ideological structures than from his individual, romantic vision. Lyndon Johnson, even if a co-conspirator (who knows if he really was?), belonged just as much to those ideological structures; therefore, his policies could be expected to have an effect similar to Kennedy's. In glorifying Kennedy, Stone is merely rebelling against the status quo, angry only that the names in the power structures changed and not concerned with the structures of power themselves.

Both HIDDEN AGENDA and JFK fit nicely into the category of "Z Movies," or films in the tradition of Costa Gavras' political thriller Z. Outlined in an article by Guy Hennebelle in *Cineaste*, Z Movies "only use 'politics' as a convenient reference to create the illusion that they are seriously dealing with a problem" (30). One of HIDDEN AGENDA's major problems is that Loach does not examine the sociopolitical reasons for British domination of Northern Ireland. Rather, he just creates an interesting detective story, complete with easily identifiable good guys and bad guys. Politics serve as a means to that end, but not as an end in and of itself. The same is true of JFK, which prefers to dwell on the hunt for Kennedy's killers as opposed to giving its viewers any analysis of Kennedy's own ties to the power structures that killed him.

Hennebelle further writes that Z Movies "revive most of the Hollywood gimmicks in their glossing over of reality — the recourse to out-of-the-ordinary heroes who are all put into extraordinary situations, contrivances of editing, pounding musical scores, and deliberate ideological fuzziness..." This certainly applies to both JFK and HIDDEN AGENDA. Both their "heroes," be they from Scotland Yard or the New Orleans D.A.'s office, find themselves in a situation which is by definition extraordinary since the films depend on shocking viewers to maintain their tension. Both films have very "fuzzy" ideology. Are viewers of HIDDEN AGENDA supposed to sympathize with the members of the IRA? According to JFK, anti-Castro Cubans may have had a role in Kennedy's assassination, but where does Stone come down on the question of U.S. involvement with Cuba? Neither film has a coherent ideological perspective. Rather, both dispense with ideology whenever

they can in order to concentrate on the heroic quest of their middle class, white male protagonist. To do otherwise would alert viewers to the contradictions that rooting for these fellows entails.

The key differences between these two films lies in their divergent visual styles. *HIDDEN AGENDA* uses a classical realist, narrative cinematic style with invisible editing, emphasis on narrative causality, etc.. No visual pyrotechnics here, just the facts, ma'am. *JFK*, on the other hand, makes use of a highly stylized form, with high-speed montage sequences, use of black and white footage, and crosscutting staged and documentary material. The difference between these two forms—realist and montage—in many ways signals the films' respective goals.

Loach's film is a tightly constructed narrative about what happens to an U.S. lawyer. Nothing is left for the viewer to wonder about. The lawyer's fate is explicitly shown—even if the characters themselves are left a bit fuzzy. Of the classical narrative in the mystery film, David Bordwell writes

"The mystery film relies completely upon cause and effect... [and] those links are always found, so the gaps of the mystery film are temporary, not permanent" (40).

No loose ends in this film are left untied. *HIDDEN AGENDA* presents a linear exposition of events that have supposedly been hidden from public view. Its editing style works in the same way, leading viewers along by the hand, never engaging in any stylistic invention might make them uncomfortable. The film's ideology acts in the same way, as discussed previously. *HIDDEN AGENDA* breaks no genuinely new ground, be it in terms of narrative structure or political information. As Hennebelle writes, "What usually happens ...is that these forms, being far from innocent, revenge themselves" (29). Loach is constrained by his use of the classical style because this style assumes a simply and directly told story. The ideology matches the form that carries it.

What, then, to make of Stone's highly stylized *JFK*, much of which is presented in a rapid fire montage style and which finally leaves many questions unanswered? Stone has said,

"*JFK* is one of the fastest movies ever made. It's like splinters to the brain. We had 2500 cuts, maybe 2200 set-ups" (Connors and Gardels 52).

This style fits classical theories of montage, considering the film's ambiguous conclusions and relatively non-linear structure. Soviet film theorists had been concerned above all with montage as a collision of ideas and an attempt to form a synthesis. As Eisenstein writes, the "formulation and investigation of the cinema as forms of conflict yield the first possibility of devising a homogeneous system of visual dramaturgy" (55). *JFK*, on the level of its narrative and its visuals, presents the conflict of a large number of concepts or images. *JFK* assumes a far more sophisticated viewer than does *HIDDEN AGENDA*. Stone paints a complex picture of the assassination, one that may or may not involve, among others, the CIA, the FBI, anti-Castro Cubans, far-right survivalists, the mafia, the U.S. Army, and the Postmaster General. Correspondingly, the film has a very dense visual style,

frequently based on quickly cut, associative montages. An example of such image conflict is the sequence where a gunshot is heard and there is a quick cut to the Zapruder film and then back to a nervous-looking Garrison, twitching his head with each shot JFK's style owes much to MTV for its flashiness and willingness to experiment and to the avant-garde for its brash use of found footage-

An example of an avant-garde film that uses found footage to make a political statement is Bruce Conner's REPORT. REPORT also presents a collage (both aural and visual) about Kennedy's assassination. Both films re-construct the documented event in order to try to make sense out of it and explore its social ramifications. Conner's film fits in with his ongoing concern with the relation between vision and violence. Stone's film lacks the analysis of voyeurism that is key to Conner's work. In fact, JFK works in a way that Conner would probably be appalled by. Stone has said about JFK:

"I want you, the viewer, to be in the skin of the event, inside the surface
.... I want you to feel the sorrow, the pity, the pain, fear and horror"
(Conners and Gardels 51).

Stone's statement here invites viewers to relive the national tragedy, to once again take an intense and personal part in the event's voyeurism in a way that owes much to modernism's demand for personal involvement with the aesthetic object. Conner's film, on the other hand, insists on distancing from the event itself. P. Adams Sitney writes of REPORT,

"The film uses the emotional matrix of the Kennedy assassination evoked by the newsreel material and above all by the verbal report, while establishing an ever-widening distance from it..." (313).

Stone's project utilizes its material for an effect that is just the opposite of distancing, thus missing the point of his stylistic source material. Conner wants to say that what is really sickening is not so much what we're watching (although that is appalling) but that we are so obsessed with watching it. Stone's statement suggests that he welcomes such obsession, just as he welcomes hero worship of Kennedy. A more progressive text would be suspicious of such blind, rigorous involvement with aesthetic objects and political figures.

On many levels, Stone gives his viewer a lot more to chew on than does Loach. The "splinters to the brain" analogy is perceptive; JFK's viewers get little bits and pieces of both images and facts and are expected to assemble them cohesively. But neither Stone nor Loach move beyond the candy of the political thriller into a meatier analysis of the conflicts that produced the systems that the films' "heroes" are supposedly fighting against. HIDDEN AGENDA and JFK forsake their potential to be empowering films in favor of being entertaining ones. Albert writes,

"Conspiracy theory has the appeal of a mystery — it is dramatic, compelling, vivid, and human" (19).

As mainstream films, HIDDEN AGENDA and JFK predictably simplify subject matter to make it appealing to as large an audience as possible. But in so doing, the films sacrifice the integrity of the significant accusations they level against their respective governments. Because they fail to engage in substantive institutional

analysis, these films do not point to any more societal change than putting new names in positions of (already corrupted) power. When the heroes of both JFK and HIDDEN AGENDA express just how "shocked" they are to discover the extent of corruption in mainstream political institutions, I cannot help but think of the scene in CASABLANCA where Chief of Police Claude Rains says he is "shocked" to discover gambling going on at Rick's American Cafe, and right then a young waiter hands him his winnings.

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JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Montage

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from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 20-25

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Aiming to create a political response, Soviet filmmakers Kuleshov, Eisenstein, Pudovkin and others used montage — the cutting and editing of film stock — to incite revolution. The clashing or complimenting images prompted a sensory reaction, serving the political aims of filmmakers and suggesting the politics of the day. Capitalism, in its opportunistic use of the subversive (i.e., the media's appropriation of 60s radicalism for an 80s and 90s sell) has taken a shine to montage for its own purposes. Its goal is largely sales: the literal marketing of a product the marketing of a stance which serves to sell a product or the more common marketing of a political agenda through emotional and ideological persuasion.

Whether used for a directly commercial intent or indirectly forming ideology which encourages a consumptive mentality, montage has become the means for communication in our age. Cropping up on MTV, on network television news and in contemporary film appears the new montage of emotion for politics and profit. We have learned that the Soviets' methods hold true and exact the kind of response which serves the culture industry as easily as they played handmaiden to Bolshevik filmmakers.

MTV is perhaps the most compulsive user of a chaotic editing style, from its music videos to the political sell of its public service announcements (race/ environment/ AIDS awareness spots). Billy Joel's historical Top-40 montage "We Didn't Start the Fire" provides an example of the music video's standard use of montage, as well as Joel's in particular. "We Didn't Start the Fire," like the nightly news, is a musical and visual summation of history — one that the MTV audience can grasp. For viewers and for Joel, the 1960s are summed up by a teenage girl in tie-dye burning a bra in her mother's kitchen. This sense of superficial rebellion appeals to an audience engaged in the same aesthetic rebellions. But Joel also makes use of several closed referents in his video, such as the image of a Viet Cong about to be shot point-blank. Yet the energy expended in such an emotive effort is minimal. The viewer no doubt recognizes the Viet Cong photo as exemplary of the 60s, but the image is fleeting and only one of many such images, and therefore it resists contextual analysis.

The very ambiguity of the song's title, "We Didn't Start the Fire," rejects a closer examination of the image. Images of the 60s are a hotbed, readily creating

responses. When assembled in rapid fire montage, those images have a powerful impact- the young girl with arm raised over the body of a dead student at Kent State; a flower placed in a National Guardsman's weapon; any stock image of Kennedy/King.

Critic John Berger describes how reproduced images affect us:

"For the first time ever, images of art have become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, free. They surround us in the same way as a language surrounds us. They have entered the mainstream of life over which they no longer, in themselves, have power." [1] [[open notes in new window](#)]

This same analysis of high art's loss of power when given low art's range applies to how culture drains political images once full meaning by overproducing them. By reducing the 1960s-or any decade-to stock images, the singularity of an event becomes lost. The complexity of each struggle and the personalities of those who defined it become erased. The capitalist ideal of a single, or several, heroic individuals is created. Change (and a vague change at that) becomes simplistically attributed to recognizable symbols, and most of history is buried. MTV and media have claimed history as their own. They interpret the past (10 days ago or 30 years ago) in purely visual terms. Berger continues:

"A people or class which is cut-off from its own past is far less free to choose and to act as a people or class than one that has been able to situate itself in history." (p. 33)

In constantly, obsessively using empty images of our past, television splits us more from the relevance of history, and consequently, from our present. In the Red Hot Chili Peppers' remake of Stevie Wonder's 1973 "Higher Ground," members of the band stand superimposed over 60s psychedelic backgrounds; at times they lie stretched out, using their bodies to make spinning geometric designs. With the song's lyrics, images appear in the background, literalizing the words: "soldiers" (group of marching soldiers) "keep on waning" (explosion) "The powers keep on lying" (canon firing and a cartoon explosion) "While the people" (crowd) "keep on dying" (bombed out building on fire). These black and white newsreel and fictional images are contrasted to shots of the band, in vivid color, and they politicize the song. We recognize the piece's critical tone, but the imagery is empty. Rather than updating a 1970's commentary with a 1990's remake which has relevance to our time, the video only suggests the band's critical stance and creates a mood.

The psychedelia recalls another time, but the video gives no indication for what purpose it is used. The past appears unreal, since the images seem vaguely comical or entirely vague: black and white, static, unrelated to the present. The very construction of some of the images, such as cartoon explosions coupled with a real canon firing, further removes these images from reality and any coherent ideological significance.

The imagery chosen, and the assembly thereof further classify this specific use of montage. Utilizing the innovative techniques of the Russian formalists but making montage its own, MTV's use of the technique actually runs counter to the Soviets' intentions. There was a radicalism implicit in montage: of disorder, confusion and

colliding images. Here, montage creates a kind of inertia. At the disposal of an industry that channels adolescent angst into a cathartic product, montage works as carefully assembled confusion. Montage approximates the inherent confusion and numbing effect of certain events-the rapid heartbeat and jostling of a crowd, demonstrations where police beat protesters, a Chinese man blocking a tank's path. It juxtaposes images of many such events to produce an effect not acted upon, but felt. An image of injustice, of power out of control, is horrible. But when seen along with other injustices, it becomes something people cannot act on. The media's appropriation of political images through montage could have the effect of making us a nation of chronic passive bystanders, watchers of world events but not participants.

The Scorpions narrate their video "Wind of Change" (from the album "Crazy World") with such inert, politicized images. The video is bracketed by footage from 1961 and 1990 at "Potsdam Platz, Berlin," the subtitles state, at the Berlin Wall as it is erected and then dismantled. These images, standing alone, might correlate with the title "Winds of Change." However, housed within these historic bookends stands a succession of imagery so divergent and at odds with the lyrics about "change" that it renders the montage meaningless. This string of images is seen interspersed with footage of the band playing concerts in different locales: Soviet soldiers/protesting South Africans/various shots of helicopters/a man climbing upon a tank in Tiananmen Square/Palestinians throwing rocks/explosions, used to enunciate drum beats/the Exxon Valdez/ Chinese soldiers/ coffins draped in U.S. flags.

The imagery is often at odds with the lyrics. For example, the line, "Did you ever think we could be so close, like brothers?" is, ironically, illustrated with an image of Chinese soldiers en masse, in Tiananmen Square. The piece gives no indication or suggestion that such a contradictory juxtaposition of images and words has a purpose. It appears the video makers meant to "politicize" an otherwise bland song. The imagery is so divergent and so melodramatic when cut against concertgoers holding aloft cigarette lighters and sparklers, it's hard to incorporate song and image. Yet, in their choice of news footage and their song's title, the band is placing itself and its audience within a historical context to heighten the song's mood and capitalize on powerful imagery.

The breadth of the imagery and the many news clips invoked accomplish what Berger has suggested. In their overuse, they drain the events depicted of meaning and significance. Images such as these, whether of police resistance or our military's tanks in the Persian Gulf also expand upon Richard Dyer's definition of entertainment as Utopian.[2] These images deliver the possibility of momentary escape, as Dyer suggests, but they also create a kind of anti-Utopia: a doom-ridden, sorrowful escape, one that offers release while reminding its audience of the inevitability of pain or injustice. We begin to glory in our ideological slavery to this imagery because it's morbidly fascinating. It echoes the adrenaline rush of fear and our communal role in a fragile, dangerous society.[3]

Like the Gulf war itself, anti-Utopian imagery carries a double blow. It declares how far we've advanced technologically, and how little the world has changed; it's like nostalgia for primitivism. While the song "Wind of Change" speaks of change, its visual shock comes from dated news images of disruption, upheaval, repression

and negation — not the optimistic progression the Berlin Wall bracketing suggests.

MTV is not the first medium to appropriate montage. The technique originated as an editing device. The Russians built upon montage to create a form that would allow editing the same preeminence as theme. From *CITIZEN KANE* to *PSYCHO* to *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE*, U.S. cinema has reverted to D.W. Griffith's editing device for visceral effect and has used montage to suspend the viewer in acceptance and belief. It is a device of persuasion brought on by the simplest motivation: to have the audience accept the story. In *PSYCHO* the oft-quoted shower scene demonstrates Hollywood's interest in the technique (Florida's Universal Studios has an attraction demonstrating how the scene was edited to involve the audience in the "magic" and celebrate industrial expertise).

The scene, with its rapid cuts, impossible angles and assaulting rhythm, does many things. It has us identify with the victim while sharing the victimizer's point of view, provides a visual assault which simulates an actual assault, and establishes Hitchcock as a master of form. In addition, *PSYCHO* and the "March of Time" sequence in *CITIZEN KANE* use montage to highlight a single occurrence from different angles, perspectives and viewpoints for persuasion. Montage in *PSYCHO* elaborates a murder, in *CITIZEN KANE* it elaborates a life.

In MTV the colliding images are most often unique and do not expand upon a single perspective. Furthermore, MTV takes rhythmic cutting to a new extreme, often syncing editing and sound as in the Chili Peppers' video, where lyrics orchestrate image. And beyond Hollywood's urging of the audience to "believe," MTV asks the audience to go a step further, to act upon the inspirational succession of images to buy.

Eisenstein and his formalist conspirators created montage to incite revolution, by expanding upon Hegel's revolutionary formula that antithesis and thesis result in synthesis. Montage today has shifted 180 degrees away from the formalist vision and has subverted revolution. There's no longer the stylized dialectical clashing of images that the Russians espoused, which were designed to activate their audiences. Today, montage most often subscribes to Pudovkin's idea of "linkage," in its emphasis on continuity and on orchestrating audience emotions in a linear fashion. However, whereas the Russians' attention was directed at creating a precise, conscious and premeditated effect, today linear montage has evolved without premeditation. This editing technique has been garnered from films and commercials and adapted to MTV, but its politics are not calculated.

MTV's use of montage is only a highly individual, stylized representation of what our society has come to mean. When, more rarely, the more radical and stylized Eisensteinian model of "collision" montage is followed in MTV, it hollowly echoes the dialectic. But rather than encourage response, it insures the status quo and props up the righteousness of our system for all to see. In this generation, seemingly opposed images — a U.S. soldier in the Gulf, a child — suggest a similarity in technique to the Russians. However, because MTV is entertainment and consumer-based, without the Soviets' goals of political inspiration, its use of montage is more typically "open." In the quickly edited, multiple imaged, soundtrack narrated MTV montage, images create a never-ending stream of discourse which mimics the unrelenting stream of desire and product in capitalism.

A narrative without end is created, one which resists formation of opinion or ideas. Images of conflict do not necessarily conflict. When heaped one upon the other, they remain empty, inert symbols which flash by too quickly and number too many to analyze or capture. The only seeming way to stop the discourse is to become in control of the images: buy the record. Purchase means empowerment and recognition of the imagery.

In one sense, however, MTV montage has an affinity with the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s in its emphasis on rhythm to orchestrate image. The montage's quick cutting mimics and complements the song's force. The visual beat becomes as compelling as the auditory one. As Susanne Langer has suggested, music is related to feeling in its form, much as the powerful effect of MTV comes from its coupling of visual and auditory senses. In a recent New York Times article describing composer and director collaborations such as Prokofiev's scoring of Eisenstein's ALEXANDER NEVSKY, Edward Rothstein states,

"The problem is that music can be more powerful than the image it accompanies. It can turn an innocent motion ominous, make a horrific event humorous, and amplify or distort psychological and emotional effects. Music is not an accessory to an image; it can direct us to the image's heart or overturn it completely." [4]

Contemporary video artists have recognized the impact of syncing image to sound and more significantly, joining politicized images to sound. Unlike the television advertisements shown beside the videos, contemporary montage rarely relies upon spoken or printed commentary, thus greatly strengthening its visceral effect and freeing the imagery to function on its own. And while both MTV and television ads often make use of quickly paced montage, the commercial functions as a specific call to action. The music video could be considered a general call to several actions: buying the record, the clothing, the politics, the station.

While the overt sell of a band's music in the music video seems obvious, the network more subtly offers "public service" spots, which actually serve the channel's private interests. MTV announced a "Save Walden Woods" contest in which viewers competed for merchandise under the guise of political action. A portion of payment made for the 900 number called (or, if the entry is mailed in, no contribution is made) is given to a fund, which has unexplained membership and agenda and purports to save the woods in which Thoreau walked. Viewer motivation to contribute comes from merchandise carefully chosen to relate to the issue. This includes a Don Henley-authored book autographed by the likes of Sting and Janet Jackson, the chance to meet Don Henley, outdoor clothing and a mountain bike that befit environmental awareness (because looking aware is as important as being aware). After the announcer reels off the list of merchandise, we become aware of the incidental nature of saving Walden forest.

Other non-MTV funded advertisements betray the advertisers' recognition of its viewers' interests. An Education-First sponsored call to stay in school plays the song "Money" on MTV as images of expensive watches, cars, homes, stereos and jewelry are shown. The announcement at the end of the appeal is "Stay in School, Don't Learn the Hard Way." It tells the viewer that staying in school is crucial if young people want all the things education can buy: "Money don't get everything, it's true, but what it don't get, I can't use." This grotesque reduction of education to

the perceived audience's interests, its pandering to the teen buying lust inspired by the channel, demonstrates the importance of advertisers' knowing to whom they speak. It is to a network or channel's advantage to define its viewership and create a specific demographic group so that the music and associated products sell better, thus guaranteeing the network higher advertising rates. MTV obviously relies upon these public service promos, which look like committed activism on the station's part. In actuality they are just more commercials playing to the aspirations and concerns of its audience.

A telling example is a "controversial" (the buzzword that boosts ratings) spot in which Madonna implores MTV viewers to vote. Rather than offer a clear and direct political message, the spot brings about further controversy through Madonna's minimalist costume and her draping herself in the U.S. flag. The issue of voting gets relegated to the background, if even noticed at all. Using Madonna to "sell" voting is ironic because we can't look beyond the image-the "controversy." The medium is the message and the medium is Madonna.

The audience is told to recognize itself in these politicized messages and, in addition, to formulate oneself through these messages as well as through the music, clothes and products that go along with it. MTV has recognized the value of selling to the audience it has created. It does so through the proper merchandising, since its audience is as apt to buy the politically correct record album as it is the politically correct social stance. MTV illustrates that appropriating subversive devices does not necessarily result in subversion. The choice which MTV most often offers — dress, attitude, slang and behavior which reject the adult — ironically, looks most like an introduction to "adult" ideology. It's consumption used to make a point. Ripped jeans function the same way a Mercedes does in the attitude marketplace. Just because teenagers feel more savvy because their attitude is upfront and stated in boldface on a T-shirt or in a song's lyrics doesn't mean that the concealed aims of having a particular car or dinnerware are any less "political" forms of expression.

Because MTV is not as limited as film, and has gone beyond the theatre or home, into beauty parlors, record stores, clothing stores and can be bought in itself, it has an expanded influence. The most explicit example of this more influential role of montage occurs when department stores use videos in their clothing departments. The videos become a kind of foreplay to the clothes; the seductive pulse and pose of the station and its message of empowerment through purchase is intensified in a realm where purchase is all important. MTV expands its consumptive breadth with consumer demand. Like anything, media must adapt and evolve to keep abreast of consumer trends while also creating consumer tastes.

This is why montage at the disposal of MTV is such a powerful tool- its a narcotic for a youth culture channeling all aversion and resentment into processed images which require no analyzing. These images are seen in a place where the viewer is so often alone, unengaged in a dialogue about the imagery. They are seen in his or her home. John Berger describes publicity or advertising in a way that sums up MTV's appeal to a youth culture trying to reach out and make sense of an unclear society:

"Publicity turns consumption into a substitute for democracy. The choice of what one eats (or wears or drives) takes the place of significant political choice. Publicity helps to mask and compensate for

all that is undemocratic within society. And it also masks what is happening in the rest of the world" (p. 149).

Or, as Dyer states,

"...while entertainment is responding to needs that are real, at the same time it is also defining and delimiting what constitutes the legitimate needs of people in our society" (p. 28).

In our fragmented society, where concrete examples of divergent views are rare, potentially problematic opinions become packaged and gussied up for better, happier consumption. Commonly, Americans are encouraged to make a choice, generally between polar opposites with no room for compromise. With the Live Aid concert, critics of poverty sang about the world rallying together to fight the problem, as if awareness itself were enough. More subtle issues affecting poverty — bureaucracy, civil war, and genocide — could not be addressed. The world rallied to "fight" poverty by purchasing a record or attending a benefit concert. More recently, proponents of, not necessarily the Gulf war, but more amorphously, building U.S. soldiers' self-esteem, sing and produce a video to signify their perspective. The troops see the video as evidence of support.

A growing number of bands have politics as a selling point, such as Sinead O'Connor, Midnight Oil, and Jesus Jones. Once so-called "alternative" bands, now mainstream pop, they have recognized the emotional appeal of a politicized rock. As Lisa Lewis states in *Gender Politics* and *MW*, a dichotomy has historically existed between "serious" rock music and fluffy pop.

"Audiences of pop music were chided for being less sophisticated and more susceptible to the record industry's persuasive salesmanship and it (pop music) was maligned as the creation of the commercial music industry, and therefore deemed trivial and unworthy of critical attention." [5]

But the music video's inclusion of political imagery functions to deny categorizing the band as superficial or profit-bound. When a band seems to be making a political statement, commerce seems to take a backseat. In fact, the two work hand-in-hand. Additionally, to include a political theme can immediately qualify a band as "alternative," a popular concept for youth obsessed with the hip and different. In this way, ideology is sold in the marketplace and revolution reduced to the right look. We are a nation of Pavlovian dogs, with the proper visual cues triggering a programmed response.

As always, MTV recognizes the power of music to create a sensual response. Its "socially aware" *Save the Rainforest/ Anticensorship! Freedom of Expression! Voting as Personal Empowerment* messages help to enhance this response. You simultaneously buy the channel, the record, and the politics. The video! artists/ music/ products reinforce each other and their own tenets of youth revolution and style. For this younger generation, however, revolution means a kind of politicized posing. The consumer's ability to choose among hair gels, sneakers and CDs in the marketplace defines democracy. To be a revolutionary in the 1990s largely requires the successful mastery of a look and attitude to match the sound.

We live in a nation of processed politics as evidenced by the range of popular political choice available — Democrat or Republican. The Gulf War protesters were criticized because they so often looked like caricatures of 60s revolution: they've got the clothes, now they want the subversion, however mild, to go with the look. Perhaps the only chance of effective revolution in today's United States is to forget the possibility of having your demonstration broadcast, since that subjects the rebellious act to the medium's editorial power. Instead go to the source of information, as did the ACT-UP members who on one occasion interrupted *The CBS Evening News* during Dan Rather's introduction.

Other media have appropriated MTV-styled video montage, not necessarily for political aims, but often as a storytelling shortcut. Given the standard feature film's length and the contemporary demand for visual explanation, montage to condense storytelling helps filmmakers who want to make a long story short. In *SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY*, a musically scored sequence shows Julia Roberts "recovering" from her abusive husband's emotional grip by trying on costumes and personalities as her drama teacher-boyfriend watches. Recalling an almost identical sequence in *PRETTY WOMAN*, montage in this case not only condenses storytelling and conveys an idea of recovery in a limited time, but the segment must also be seen as highlighting Julia Roberts' star quality and physical attributes in a way the music video highlights the rock star's.

A performer is being sold based on emotional/physical appeal, the capitalist marketing of personality. This is a typical video age shortcut. Rather than rely on detailed character exposition or an economically constructed plot, montage is used for its aesthetic appeal and simplified structure. Film, like MTV, has recognized the attraction of these terse, seductive image-bytes to persuade. In the incestuous nature of media, MTV may in turn borrow the film's montage as a video-clip to advertise the movie.

In an otherwise politically fortuitous bit of filmmaking, Ridley Scott's recent *THELMA AND LOUISE* falsely concludes with a happy picture postcard look back at the last two hours we have watched, betraying a theme which rang true in its pessimism. Here, montage functions in a Hollywood-sanctioned way to leave an audience satisfied. What's more, the film's message about the inescapability of female victimization becomes negated by images that, ironically, hint at the audience's temporary appeasement through "pictures." While in its previous Hollywood incarnations, montage aided storytelling and exposition, in this instance montage is less integrated into the narrative. As with the technique's appearance in *SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY*, here montage is an insular device with functions wholly its own. The use of montage that ends *THELMA AND LOUISE*, running counter to the bulk of the film, belies the schizophrenia of contemporary Hollywood, which chronically qualifies its message for the perceived audience's good. And, as is typical in music video, *THELMA AND LOUISE* could be said to advocate a moderately subversive view, but the technique of montage, in its apolitical, visceral form, waters down the subversion.

Montage is a tool to milk the audience's sensibilities and emotions. We respond to a combination of music and pictures, not as a coherent narrative, but as emotive cues. A picture of a child can create a varied response, but a picture of a child intercut with a flag, a U.S. service man/woman in the Gulf, and Saddam Hussein

elicits a particular response — one not coherently formulated but definitely felt.

The television news has long recognized the power of image to set the agenda but in its increased media savvy, it has appropriated the sensory impact of kinetic montage, most recently of the Persian Gulf War. Artfully manipulative was the *Today Show's* coupling of eerie music (the psychological music provided auditory communication of tension/ threat! fear) and a visual foreground of Saddam/ troops/ family to create an ideological Armageddon in the viewer's mind. We "see what could happen" if we aren't vigilant, and our enthusiasm for war becomes bolstered through visual celebrations of military prowess and technology. A shot of Patriots intercepting Scuds, the video-game spectacle of our weaponry, and images of U.S. armed forces linked man and machine in a fascistic celebration of our national might.

These images suggest the Utopian possibilities of technology, and the capability of scientific progress to liberate and glorify us. The music is ominous, but the visuals show us one man (Saddam) facing off against a bevy of combat troops. The images suggest we represent the majority in numbers and in righteousness. The foreboding melody signals his eventual destruction. As Dyer suggests in his description of how audience reality becomes filmic Utopia — danger, fear, difficulty, and most of all, ambiguity, are negated in images of effusive might and righteousness. The visual display of the missiles approximates the patriotic thrill of fireworks, which was a comparison often evoked by newscasters.

Montage in the newsroom serves an additional purpose when the week's news is edited together. A mini-history is created, a history set and assembled by the medium which delivers it. As an advertisement for CNN, the montage is "history" promoting a cable network. All the war's ramifications — personal tragedy, our colonialist sensibilities, or the destruction of other nations' citizenship — are reduced to the drama, excitement and patriotic resolve created by the montage. The week's wrap-up sums up the national agenda, one we are to embrace as our own.

Like the welcome home parade in New York, certain devices are used to gloss over ugly incongruities and to synthesize popular opinion through images and spectacle rather than debate. The parade was a natural "conclusion" and tying up of the loose ends in a war that, as the images seemed to demonstrate, had been clear-cut and clean. After all, we saw the troops move in, we saw marvelous pyrotechnic demonstrations, and we saw the men and women come home. The U.S. military controlled the images that might have created controversy or dissent and thus diminished opposition to the dramatic "flow" of the war. With no visual evidence to the contrary, U.S. citizens are willing to believe the war was as surgical as it looked. The great difference between the Persian Gulf War and the Vietnam War was the abundance of static, photojournalism portraits of the blood and guts of warfare in Vietnam. During the Gulf crisis, the absence of these images led news programs to use more shrewd "emotional editing" techniques. On a purely visual level, if Vietnam was the essence of what war is, then the Gulf War images were what we would like it to be. Through montage, the media picks and chooses the images that matter (largely graphic, recognizable, Western-biased images that favor shock over sense) and assembles them to create a sensory response. Propaganda is a function of any government, but it should be recognized at a cultural, artistic level. Montage

as propaganda tool appeals to the senses in a way we do not necessarily recognize but react to, nevertheless. Perhaps its power is all the greater because of this.

NOTES

1. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972), p. 32.
2. Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," *Movies and Methods, Volume 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
3. The current wave of dread-derived "entertainment," I believe, supports this love of fear, which has its roots in the horror film but is presently made more explicit and personal in true crime television, the epidemic interest in serial killers and the obsessive viewership of our latest war.
4. Edward Rothstein, "Need More Humor Or Horror? Add Music Very Carefully," *New York Times*, Sunday, Nov. 3, 1991, p.13.
5. Lisa A. Lewis, *Gender Politics and MTV* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), p. 29.

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Deewar

The "fiction" of film and "fact" of politics

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from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 26-32

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A close textual analysis of any film should locate the film within an historical and political conjuncture, the context in which it was made, and the extent to which it articulates that context. A textual analysis of the film DEEWAR (WALL, 1976)[1] [\[open notes in new window\]](#) is affected in significant ways by the particular historical moment in which it was produced. To fully understand the film, it is important to understand the turbulent political situation of the early 70s. I wish to argue that DEEWAR is a text rich in meaning. It is a polysemic text, offering a range of readings skillfully woven together for a heterogeneous audience.

I cannot speak for the audience and the varied meaning it makes, or how viewers can "shift" the text to fit their own social positioning. However, I do wish to identify the different skeins within the text that might be negotiated by a variegated audience. I will apply the idea of negotiation as developed by Stuart Hall. Hall suggests that meaning is not imposed or passively accepted. Rather, it is arrived at or "negotiated" through the struggle between several competing strands within the texts. Such negotiation correlates with the social situation of the audience.[2] I will demonstrate that DEEWAR can simultaneously be read as a family melodrama, an action-thriller, a religious-mythical or radical-subversive text. The success of the film therefore lies in its ability to mobilize more than one reading of the film ensuring a wide appeal. Finally, there is another level at which analysis of the film can be meaningful, and that is the analysis of the film text within the metatext of the film industry with its configuration of actors and star system, its relation to politics, the state and society in general. In this analysis I will attempt to interweave an analysis of the text and metatext.

A brief outline of the story of DEEWAR at the outset will be helpful. Vijay Verma (played by superstar Amitabh Bachchan) and Ravi Verma (played by Shashi Kapoor) are the sons of a trade unionist, Anand Verma, who was defeated and disgraced by the management of his firm. The father deserts the family, and the sons are raised by their mother, who suffers the trials and tribulations of a poor single mother. Vijay Verma, the elder brother, grows up with an acute awareness of his father's humiliation and is victimized for his father's supposed misdeeds. In the process of fighting for his rights Vijay, who starts out as a dockyard worker, becomes a smuggler and a leading figure of the underworld.

His brother Ravi, on the other hand, receives an education and becomes an upright police officer.

Ravi romances Veera, the daughter of a senior police officer. Vijay has an affair with Anita, a woman he meets at a bar. When Anita gets pregnant Vijay decides to abandon his life in the underworld, not wanting to pass onto his son the humiliation he received because of his father. But it is too late. Ravi decides to arrest Vijay, notwithstanding their filial relation. Their mother sides with the law-abiding son even though the decision pains her greatly. The two brothers clash. Vijay dies in the encounter and Ravi is presented a police gallantry award by the State.

I will begin with the analysis of the film text within the metatext of the industry and its most successful star who plays the role of Vijay Verma in DEEWAR — Amitabh Bachchan. Film and politics in India have been curious bedfellows. On the one hand, film texts produced within the Bombay film industry, the commercial filmmaking sector, have always eschewed any overt political articulation other than a discourse on "nationalist" and "anti-nationalist" politics. This reticence is often attributed to state intervention: the government's heavy-handed censorship policy, which fits into a general pattern of hostile relations between the government and the film industry.

On the other hand, film has been close to politics. The heads of two states in Southern India have been famous film stars: M.G. Ramachandran in Tamil Nadu and N.T. Ramarao in Andhra Pradesh. In 1984, as a result of his meteoric rise to super-stardom in the 70s, Amitabh Bachchan, the protagonist of DEEWAR, became an M.P. (Member of Parliament). Therefore, to examine the politics of this film one cannot limit oneself to the film text alone; we have to read the actor within these texts and within the industry as a "parallel text," as Vijay Mishra suggests, functioning within the metatext of contemporary politics.[3]

Discussion of India's political climate in the 70s will be helpful at this point as a backdrop against which we can better understand the film. Meaning in texts, as John Fiske points out, parallels social power, its distribution, and political struggle for it in society.[4] Knowing the political context will also help in understanding the interplay between text and metatext discussed earlier. The film DEEWAR appeared in 1976, roughly thirty years after independence (1947) in a decade that was characteristically different from the earlier two decades of the 50s and 60s that post-independent India had lived through. The 50s were a period of reconstruction, optimism and hope. The 60s were a period of setback, albeit one of solidarity when the nation rallied together against the Chinese aggression of 1962 and the India-Pakistan war of 1965 when nationalist fervor was high. But by the late 60s the dream of the "springtime" after liberation from colonial rule, as Timothy Brennan puts it, was over.[5]

The major split within the Congress party in 1967 marked the unleashing of Machiavellian politicking within the dominant Congress party and the ultimate consolidation of the Congress in the Parliament and State Assemblies under the stranglehold of the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi. In the 1971 war between India and Pakistan, India successfully intervened on behalf of the Bangladesh liberation movement. This gave a further boost to Indira Gandhi's image.

There was, however, a sudden and surprising reversal in 1972-73 when events took a downturn, beginning with a failure of the monsoons that led to food shortages and price rise, aggravated by the Bangladesh refugees that had crossed the border. The situation was compounded by the oil-shock of 1973-74 and subsequent inflation and unemployment. Government mismanagement and corruption incited food riots and industrial strikes. The IMF loan in 1974 and the economic policies the state was compelled to follow led to a further widening of the gap between the rich and poor, as well as the beginning of the get-rich-quick phenomenon, with the system of politicians in power distributing the spoils of the industrial and trading sectors over which it had recently extended its control through nationalization. Labor movements in the country became strong as a general state of unrest had built up leading to industrial strikes (like the railway strike of 1974) that virtually paralyzed the economy. And the student movement gained widespread support under J.P. Narayan's call for "Sampooran Kranti" (Total Revolution) (the last breath of Gandhian politics in Indian public life) against corruption at all levels within the government.

The hope to unseat Indira Gandhi was lost when she resorted to strong-arm tactics, breaking the back of labor movements and adopted an authoritarian stance in national politics. All this led to the crack-down in 1975 when Indira Gandhi declared a "National Emergency" that suspended all fundamental rights of citizens. It was a nineteen month period of vicious political persecution, reminiscent of the British Rule, and directed at anyone who dared to oppose the government. This was a short-sighted attempt of the Indira Gandhi government to stay in power. But the price paid for this reign of terror was heavy. In the election that took place after the Emergency was lifted in 1977, the Congress Party was put out of power for the first time in thirty years of independent India's history, after having dominated Indian politics (during British Rule and post-independence) for seventy-five years. The political repression during the emergency had set in circulation several stories about the arrests of top leaders and powerful people who had fallen out of favor with the ruling Congress. One such story is about the legendary smuggler Haaji Mastaan.

The narrative of DEEWAR parallels the story of Haaji Mastaan in interesting ways. Haaji Mastaan was a dockworker in Bombay and rose to the position of a powerful smuggler operating in Bombay's underworld. He is known to have single-handedly threatened Bakhia, the head of a rival smuggling gang by entering his house alone in the course of an internecine feud. During the Emergency he came to prominence and was arrested under COFEPOSA (Control of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Act) by the Indira Gandhi government. Vijay Verma's life in DEEWAR, his rise from a humble dockyard worker to a powerful smuggler is paralleled to Haaji Mastaan's life and the occasion when he attacked Bakhia is compared to the moment in the film when Vijay goes to Samant's house (a rival smuggler in the film) and attacks him. But this parallel ends here and cannot be taken any further. (In the film Samant (Bakhia) is killed by Vijay (Haaji Mastaan), though in reality Bakhia was only threatened by the hot-headed Mastaan, who went on to become the leader of a small Muslim Majlis Party in Bombay).[6]

But there are interesting ways in which the actor-turned-politician Amitabh Bachchan's life (playing Vijay Verma in DEEWAR) parallels the film text. Part of the aura of charm surrounding the Bombay film industry is the wealth amassed by

top stars like Amitabh Bachchan. The fact that their fortunes depend on evasion of taxes is public knowledge and speculations about Amitabh Bachchan's wealth abound. Yet his image as an "angry young man," the voice of "the people" (the urban male proletariat) that began with his role in ZANJEER (Chain, 1970) and was perfected by the time of DEEWAR in 1976, was so powerful that in the early 80s when he turned to politics to help Rajiv Gandhi, he was voted to Parliament with an overwhelming majority in 1984. Rajiv Gandhi, an unknown entity in politics at the time, was a signifier of hope; he was called "Mr. Clean," a reference to his record that did not bear any blemish of charges of corruption, a rarity in Indian politics. Many of his close associates, of which Amitabh Bachchan was one, were seen as new and refreshing faces in the political scene and there were high hopes for radical change in the nature of national politics.

However, in 1987 the nation was rocked by the worst scandal ever — the Bofors Deal, an arms deal with a Swiss company in which top officials including Rajiv Gandhi, the then prime minister, were accused of taking a big cut to line their own pockets. Amitabh Bachchan's brother Ajitabh Bachchan was also accused of getting a share that was put away in Swiss bank accounts. While the matter is still under investigation, Amitabh Bachchan vociferously protested the charges against his brother and argued that his image was being "tarnished" by vindictive journalists. Recently, Ajitabh Bachchan has had himself vindicated to some extent by winning a lawsuit in a London court, and Amitabh Bachchan has tried to win back the image of his being a loyal "nationalist" family after all. The narrative within the text of DEEWAR is interesting because of the ironic twist it gives this later narrative.

In DEEWAR, melodrama is mobilized by making the family the site of discourse about the State in terms of "nationalist" and "anti-nationalist" conflict and rhetoric. The mother (read motherland) is torn between two sons — a smuggler, Vijay (the lawless, anti-nationalist) and Ravi, a police officer (lawful, nationalist) — in fact the kernel of state power. Smuggling has always been the signifier of villainy in Hindi films. It is an interesting signifier to choose, since it is connotative of anti-nationalism and anti-patriotism, since colonial rule.[7] In Amitabh Bachchan's life off-screen it was his brother who was embroiled in anti-nationalist activities and smuggling India's limited foreign exchange into secret Swiss accounts. The importance of "family" and the relation to the Indian State is accentuated further in Amitabh's case, by the fact that the Bachchan brothers are the sons of Harivansh Rai Bachchan, a leading national poet whose poems were taught to many of us growing up in North India, as part of the school curriculum. Amitabh Bachchan was at pains to point out the "irresponsibility" of journalists and the media that had damaged his family's name.

It is by no means a coincidence then, that the family is central to the drama in DEEWAR and other Hindi films: a common ploy is to "throw the domain of kinship morality into crisis." [8] It is for this reason that I consider the reading of Amitabh Bachchan's life as a parallel text in conjunction with the film text, as Mishra suggests, and within the metatext of film discourse and politics, a worthwhile exercise.

Turning now to the text of DEEWAR, I wish to reiterate the model of "negotiation," taken from Stuart Hall's work, which I find particularly useful to draw from in order to analyze the film. The negotiation model suggests the existence of several

competing ideological strands that contest each other within the text to become dominant. While the existence of the strands open the texts up to multiple meanings/interpretations, these are limited (as opposed to "any and every interpretation") as Christine Gledhill points out in her article "Pleasurable Negotiations." [9] They are limited by historical conditions, codes, genres and forms, to a range of meanings. DEEWAR deploys melodrama, as one of the forms to frame contemporary issues and discourse within a moral framework. DEEWAR addresses contemporary issues of social injustice, poverty, power, state, class mobility, criminality, wealth, deprivation, humiliation, class, gender, religion, within the backdrop of social unrest in the early 70s. It weaves these together skillfully to create a polysemic text, in which reception of meaning would be determined by social situations and negotiation. Negotiation here implies an active audience, which reconciles conflicting interests between a variety of meanings to arrive at their own meanings.

An obvious strand in the film is the representation of working class and a sympathetic portrayal of their issues. Vijay Verma the protagonist of the film is emblematic of this sentiment. At the very outset of the film, the beginning of the flashback, Anand "Babu," the protagonist's father, a trade union leader gives an impassioned speech to striking workers. He says they are fighting for a "new morning," when basic needs of workers are provided for — education, health-care and housing. However he is mindful not to overstep his limit when he says, they are not questioning why the rich have so much, rather, they are asking why the food barrels are empty for the poor. The reference here is to the food shortage and to grain traders, who had "hoarded" large amounts of grain to accentuate the existing shortage and created an artificial scarcity in order to make an extra buck. Throughout the Emergency, the State propaganda announced its task to be to bring these elements (grain hoarders) to book, maintain "law and order," while in fact there was unprecedented lawlessness, often perpetuated at the behest of state power.

Punished for his militancy, Anand "Babu" is forced into a life of a defeated vagrant with "nowhere" to go. It is (t)his humiliation that is stamped onto Vijay his son (both literally and metaphorically) and it becomes a driving force of a series of effects on Vijay's life. The tattoo on his body, "my father is a thief," symbolizes the constant denigration Vijay faces while growing up, a denigration that motivates a deep-seated rage against his circumstance. It is his circumstance that gets written on his body, the hieroglyphics of oppression, which as an adult he himself comments are like "the lines on the palms of one's hand" (fate), as well as an "event impressed upon his mind and heart" (experience), that "cannot be wiped out."

The film is equivocal about the role of fate and experience here, but the important thing is that it provokes a deep rage within him. He respects himself and demands respect from people, symbolizing a self-conscious acknowledgement of a lower class status and resentment against it. As a young shoe-polish boy he refuses to accept money that is "thrown" at him rather than handed to him. He rebels against religion, refuses to go to the temple; religion here bears the connotation of a Hindu way of life that accepts life's circumstances as fate — the consequences "karma" (actions) in one's past life. As a boy he throws a brick at the building contractor who humiliates his mother on the job, and as an adult fights back against Peter — the mafia in the dockyard that extracted "hafta," a fee extorted from all

dockworkers.

The dockyard is another occasion for exposition of working class life: hard physical labor, where Rahim "Chacha" (Uncle Rahim) points out "nothing but the workers have changed for the past twenty-five years," (a reference to the "badli" system — the expendability of workers, their high turnover rate as temporary employees and the instability of the workforce because of this constant flux) and the gangs that extort the workers. A worker refuses to make the contribution since he sends money home to his village (like many who migrate to the city) and loses his life for it. Vijay antagonizes Peter's men by refusing to pay the "hafta"; but Rahim pleads with him: "we are workers and have to live in a world in which the poor have to watch their step." Vijay's response to Rahim's generation of working class ethos is striking: "What has not happened in twenty-five years is going to happen now; one more worker is going to refuse the "hafia." The film, faithful to the genre of propping and celebrating individual heroes, builds in a "fight" sequence and Vijay single-handedly beats up Peter and his gang. When his mother fulminates against his bravado, he invokes his father's "cowardice": "Did you want me also to hide my face and run away?" he asks her. Vijay stands up as the hero who attempts to re-write his history, his circumstance, his destiny. He does this with his wit, skill, strength, entrepreneurship and of course his masculinity.

In contrast to Vijay, the working class figure who "makes it" in the world through smuggling, lawlessness, criminal, and anti-national activities, his brother Ravi Verma is emblematic of lower middle and middle class youth. Supported in his education by Vijay his elder brother and his mother, he faces the long unemployment lines in a world where he feels "even the last job won't be available to him," since he doesn't have the "connections" that will ensure him one. Ravi represents the disenchanted educated youth in the 70s who began to realize their education, "degrees" and "certificates" were worth nothing in a situation where jobs were simply not available. A rather ironic comment is made by Yash Chopra the filmmaker, when Ravi as a little boy runs away from their spot on the pavement dwelling (where the homeless in India live) and longingly watches the phalanx of neatly dressed school children, as the extra-diegetic music plays a famous nationalist song "saare jahaan se achcha, Hindustan hamaara" (the best in the whole world, this country of ours). But Ravi is soon to find out the stark class division that separates him from his girl-friend Veera. (Of course their romance transcends this distance and class difference is negotiated in this case by heterosexual love).

In the climactic moment of the film after Ravi and Vijay have grown very far apart in their ways, they meet under the same bridge that was once their dwelling on the pavement, a reminder of their common roots. On the sound-track "saare jahaan se achcha..." (the best in the whole universe...) is replayed extra-diegetically, adding a sardonic tone to this momentous meeting. They talk of how far apart they have moved; the opposite paths they have taken in life is discussed in an emotionally charged scene. However what is left unsaid, is the different avenues each of them had to get to where they are. Ravi had a chance to be educated, that at least opened the possibility of a passport to middle class living (as a police officer). All this is drowned, silenced, in Ravi's rhetoric of "adarsh" (ideals) and "asul" (principles).

Yet Ravi is constantly forced to face issues of class. In a poignant sequence in the

film, Ravi, in a "police encounter" fires at a kid who he later discovers has stolen bread. When he takes food to the child's parents' house, and discloses his identity, the mother flings the food back at him, refusing to accept his "charity." In a bitter indictment of the state and its oppressive network, she points to the collusion between the state that protects "big" criminals and grain hoarders, while running after petty criminals who steal food. Interestingly this sharp critique that comes from a woman is silenced immediately. She is banished from the room, as her husband begs forgiveness saying, "my wife is uneducated," and then proceeds to make his "educated" comments:

"All stealing, whether it be of a cent or a million, is a crime ...if the thousands of people dying of hunger all become thieves, it would make for an impossible situation."

(T)his "common sense"[10] ties in neatly with the analogy Ravi's boss draws between doctors and the police: just as doctors treat cancer, the police deal with crime. The police then, are not seen as endemic to violence, as the woman's succinct critique points out. In the contest between these dialogical voices, it is the latter that gets firmly reinstated. Ravi discovers the man is a teacher by profession, touches his feet in deference (a mark of respect), and leaves saying he could have only got such a (good) lesson from a teacher! The alliance between education and the state, if one may put it that way, is complete; and the uncomfortable voice of the dissenting woman is silenced — or almost silenced.

It however becomes a voice that cannot be completely silenced for Ravi. This incident is of course purposefully planted before the sequence in which Ravi finds out his own brother Vijay is a "big" smuggler, criminal, the woman said the state protects. Ravi resolves in the name of the state and the law, not to protect Vijay and demands from him instead a signature on a statement, confessing his crimes. Vijay reminds Ravi of their common experience of humiliation and hardship as children, while Ravi repeatedly admonishes him: "Will you sign it or not?" The altercation is built to a crescendo until Vijay declares he will sign it, write his confession of crimes to the state, only if Ravi gets the signature of all those who used their power to write his humiliation: the one who got their father to write (sign) himself as an outcast; the one who threw their mother out of her job; the one who tattooed his life's ignominy onto his body. What is refreshingly different in DEEWAR, from several of the "angry young man" series that the actor Amitabh Bachchan became famous for portraying, is that his anger is directed at a generalized system of oppression, a web of power networks that unleashes an everyday situation of degradation for millions of people in India. This is different in that while it is the story of an individual hero, it is not one of the individual hero's revenge against another individual industrial/ upper-class/bourgeois member.

I have so far traced one strand that can be read as a "subversive" strand of "resistance," which is nonetheless stable and often repressed in the film text. A striking example of this is the way the film ends, which is related to the way it begins — with the trappings of state power: Ravi Verma is being presented the bravery award by the police force. The entire narrative occurs in flashback (perhaps the mother's). The narrative leaves us with a strong sense of empathy for Vijay, who is punished for his lawlessness — being shot by his lawful police officer brother. In an abrupt cut we are brought back to an audience enthusiastically

applauding Ravi Verma (shot almost like a curtain call at the end of a drama). The film attempts to reinstate truth, justice, law and duty to the state. But it seems to be a feeble attempt to reimpose closure and a sense of power and control. This can perhaps be explained in terms of the filmmaker's strategy to negotiate government censorship by valorizing an upright police officer, as an antidote to the sympathy already put in place for Vijay, the "smuggler," the "criminal."

There are other strands that contest the reading I have made and struggle to be the dominant voice within the text. The film could well be classified in the genre of the "social" — a category assigned by film critics in India and unique to Hindi cinema. It entails a commentary on social life often framed within the mode of melodrama. In the case of DEEWAR social issues intersect with the family and the charged emotions associated with it. DEEWAR may also be read as a family melodrama of sibling love and rivalry; the son's (Vijay's) transgressive love for his mother, his inability to "separate" from her successfully, for which he is punished. A family reunion at the end of the film, typical of this genre, is subverted. The father is found after twenty odd years, but dies soon after. Later Vijay dies at the hands of his brother. The family is thus used as the site of conflict to exacerbate tensions and heighten emotions.

A religious-mythic reading of the text is equally possible: a moral tale of good vs. evil. In one of the episodes of Vijay and Ravi's childhood we are shown Vijay refusing to enter the temple. He sits at the bottom of the stairs waiting for his mother and Ravi to return. There is a cut to the temple bells, and in the next shot we see a grown Vijay sitting outside the temple at the bottom of the stairs, signifying a major ellipsis in time. We see a grown Ravi too return with his mother from the temple and then in a symbolic way he and Vijay walk away in opposite direction on the screen. The two sons take different paths — the "right" one to the temple and the "wrong path" that moves away from it leading only to hell, damnation and a violent death — a suitable punishment. But before that Vijay is humbled before the power of the God whom he emphatically insists he does not believe in. When he faces the prospect of his mother dying, his beliefs are challenged: from an atheist he is forced to become a believer. He returns to the steps of the temple, this time actually entering it. He pleads with the Gods not to punish his mother for his sins. His mother recovers, but in an act of retributive justice (karma) he dies, shot by Ravi, as he tries to flee from the temple.

This final act seals the faith of the believers in the victory of good over evil and in the framework of a grand justice beyond the here and now of everyday existence. The film could also be read as a prescript of characters from the MAHABHARATA, a major Indian epic. The mother in DEEWAR, like Kunti in the MAHABHARATA witnesses her son Karna going to war with his brothers and suffers the pain of watching Karna die in battle. The power of religious devotion is underscored when Vijay's resistance is broken and he visits the temple to beg for his mother's life "when all [other] routes are closed."

Like other successful films of its ilk, DEEWAR blends together different genres. Action/ thriller dynamics are built in with the suspense in smuggling, chase, fights, and cops and robbers' action of the underworld. The episodes are constructed in a tight plot that moves swiftly, exposing the intrigue and mystery associated with the underworld. It is films like DEEWAR that introduce in the 70s a new kind of

masculinity of the hero, in the figure of Amitabh Bachchan. Not only is he heroic in his single-handed struggle against oppression, but he is guaranteed agency with a new style of machismo, where physical strength is important but so is his wit and intelligence.

While there is a departure in the masculine ideal, there is a break in the feminine model as well. Thus the beginnings of a contest within gender representation become visible in DEEWAR. The mother continues to be the archetypal, suffering, pure, good mother. Veera is the good middle class girl, who brings flowers to the railway station for Ravi. But these women are in sharp contrast to Anita who hangs about in bars in the evening. This is perhaps the first time such a woman performs the role of a "heroine," defined by the singularly important attribute of being paired with the male protagonist of the film. Yet both these young heroines are set up as props to further define the heroes and their internal conflicts. This is particularly true for Anita (Vijay's girlfriend). She gratefully accepts confessions from him, the otherwise self-enclosed, aloof man. While Anita is bereft of a narrative that tells us anything about her life — why she drinks, why she is unhappy — she is at least presented as an autonomous woman. She is in control of her own sexuality, sleeps with the man she chooses without marrying him (striking for a 70s film) and has the confidence to raise a child independent of her lover. She tells Vijay she will not "force him to marry her" when she finds out she is pregnant.

It is then that Vijay decides to relent for his crimes. Not because he is repentant but because he does not wish to rewrite the same misery on his "son" (sic) ("his father was a thief"). In a strange twist of the narrative, Anita is murdered. The murder is quite unequivocally a punishment for her sexual transgression, her daring to be an autonomous self-reliant woman. Anita is coded in the manner that Hindi films represent the westernized woman: smoking a cigarette, drinking, wearing a skirt with a slit that makes an inverted "v" pointed towards her crotch. Ultimately Anita meets the fate all such women face. Death. Hindi films until the 70s were unequivocal in their stance against the expression of autonomy: it was "western," "alien," "other," and not to be permitted.

Technically, the film defines space in minimal and functional terms only. The "aesthetic of frontality" seems to be in operation, with flat shots and little depth of field in the mise-en-scene. Camera movement is also "functional," subordinated entirely to being a function of the narrative, and there is no emphasis on detail. Instead what is used are simply broad strokes suggesting certain locales — a rich or poor home, a hospital, police station or temple. Editing is used at high points of tension with focus on the faces. Lighting in the first part of the film is three point and bright, and becomes darker in the latter part as the mood in the film gets somber and conflict ridden. The narrative structure follows the life of Vijay and Ravi, with episodic events introduced to serve as exposition of theft relation to their jobs, family and love.

I have demonstrated that DEEWAR is a polysemic text capable of generating multiple meanings. What follows from this, I am arguing is that it is precisely this quality that ensures its success with a wide audience, since different segments of the audience will find different aspects of the film (family drama, action, religious or social and political issues) appealing. I wish to take a moment here to recount an interesting anecdote that illustrates how social situation can affect one's reading of

the text On my last visit to India I was interviewing audience members about their response to popular Hindi cinema in a working class area in Delhi. Mukhtiar, a seventeen-year old boy, a dropout from high school, was comparing the representation of rich-poor relations on screen with those in reality. Mukhtiar himself has been working at odd jobs since he was about thirteen and at the time was working an astounding seventeen-hour work day as a bus conductor.

In Mukhtiar's opinion the screen representation of the rich as arrogant and the poor as honest and hard-working was true to life. When I asked whether he himself had encountered upper class arrogance in the course of his work, he reported the following incident. When he worked at a gas station, on one occasion he said a rich car owner threw a coin towards him as a tip for his service. At this point he said he immediately protested and asked the man to pick the coin and hand it to him as any self-respecting person would. Surprised, I commented that this was exactly what happened to the young Vijay in DEEWAR when he was a shoeshine boy. Mukhtiar suddenly looked embarrassed. He admitted that right after he had narrated his experience he remembered the same event had taken place in DEEWAR.

The point of this rather elaborate anecdotal evidence as far as I am concerned is not to establish the veracity of Mukhtiar's tale. What seems important to me is the fact that Mukhtiar's identification with the young boy in DEEWAR seemed so complete that it was almost like an incident that he feels happened to him, or that he likes to think he is capable of responding in the way the boy in DEEWAR did. What is evident from this example is what I have argued so far: different segments of the population negotiate the film and make sense of it according to their own specific situations.

In conclusion, I will reiterate what I have done in this essay. I have attempted to locate DEEWAR as a film text within the tumultuous politics of the early 70s, of which it stands as a referent in significant ways. The film captures the pulse of the period, the unrest and confusion, and it is this resonance with the times that made its success possible. I have also read the text within the metatext of the film industry, politics, state and the interrelation between these. Finally, I have presented a textual analysis, which draws on the model of "negotiation" between multiple meanings within the text, that compete for a dominant position and that get read by audiences who reconcile the conflicting interests according to their own location and experience within a social/ cultural situation.

NOTES

1. DEEWAR credits—Director: Yash Chopra. Producer: Shrimurti Films. Screenplay: Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar.
2. Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding" in *Culture, Media, Language*. ed. Stuart Hall et al. Hutchinson. London, 1980. Pp. 128-139.
3. Mishra, Vijay. "Actor as a Parallel Text" in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* vol. 2. Pp. 47-49.
4. Fiske, John. "British Cultural Studies and Television" in *Channels of Discourse*. Ed. Robert C. Allen. University of North Carolina. Chapel Hill. 1987. P. 255.

5. Brennan, Timothy. "The National Longing for Form" in *Nation and Narration*. ed. Homi K. Bhabha. Routledge. London. 1990. P. 57.

6. Whether the representation in the film is faithful to what actually happened is not important. What is important is the fact that the circulation of such stories was accompanied by an acceptance of criminal activity in Indian political life. Criminalization of politics had arrived and was there to stay.

7. The nationalists opposed British imports that had systematically destroyed the indigenous industry through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, draining India's wealth to sponsor the Industrial Revolution in Britain. After independence protective tariff policies have continued, but controlling contraband material passing through the borders continues to be a difficult task.

8. Thomas, Rosie, "Sanctity and Scandal: The Mythology of MOTHER INDIA." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* vol. 11. P. 15.

9. Gledhill, Christine. "Pleasurable Negotiations" in *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*. Ed. Deidre Pribram. Verse. London. 1988. P. 74.

10. "Common sense" here is used in the sense that Stuart Hall uses it, based on Gramsci's work. It is the dominant definition that acquires the weight of common sense.

I wish to thank Julia Lesage, Arvind Rajagopal, Jyotsna Kapur, Naggi and Manji Pendakur for their valuable comments on this paper.

Love, Women and Flowers Behind every flower a death

by Ilene S. Goldman

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 33-38

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"Conclusions: to confront reality with a camera and to document it, filming realistically, filming critically, filming underdevelopment with the optic of the people. For the alternative, a cinema which makes itself the accomplice of underdevelopment, is sub-cinema."

— Fernando Birri, 1967[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

The Colombian filmmaking team of Maria Rodríguez and Jorge Silva are well known for a documentary cinema style that combines ethnographic filmmaking with an engaged political cinema. Their work grows out of the New Latin American Cinema movements of the 1960s, combining a mode of filmmaking informed by anthropology with a politically engaged alternative cinema. From their first film *CHIRCALES (THE BRICKMAKERS)*, 1972[2] to *AMOR MUJERES Y FLORES (LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS)*, 1988[3], Rodríguez and Silva's works have analyzed the injustices of the lives led by Colombia's lower classes, and their cinematic practice has questioned traditional processes of documentary filmmaking.

LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS deals with the socio-economic and political position of Colombia's flower growers. Specifically, the film documents the health hazards of the country's flower industry, Colombia's second largest export industry. Because the industry employs so many women, the film concentrates primarily on how the pesticides and fumigation affect women workers' health. Although the film depicts, among other things, a women's health issue, the film is not feminist in a North American sense. Rather, it deals with the issue as part of the general condition of Colombia's working classes. In this context, women's struggles are inseparable from class struggle. The film also raises the issue of the health of male workers as well as the damage done to families.

LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS' powerful presentation of the workers' struggle made the film quite controversial when shown on Colombian television. The film's critics were afraid that it would damage Colombian flower sales abroad. Its supporters applauded it for the frankness with which it confronted a serious social issue.[4]

Rodríguez and Silva always intended that their films stir up discussion about important social problems, and this goal has connected them to other Latin American filmmakers. As Rodríguez said in a 1974 interview,

"When you combine the social sciences with a mass medium like film, you are challenging the uses to which both are put by the privileged class while simultaneously putting them at the service of the working class. In contrast to the kind of hermetic treatise that only five initiates can read, this is a way to use anthropology or sociology so that the working class can put it to use analyzing their particular situation."[5]

Various forms of politicized cinema emerged in different Latin American countries throughout the 1960s. Many of the directors at that time strove to make films the working class could use, films with which the poor might identify and ones that would help them analyze their own situation. Importantly, this self-aware (self-conscious?) mode of filmmaking has not been limited to any one type of film. It encompasses documentary, narrative fiction and experimental film (and video) making.

The New Latin American Cinema was influenced by Italian neo-realism as well as by John Grierson's social documentary. In the former movement Latin American filmmakers found a cinema

"that discovered amidst the clothing and the rhetoric of development another Italy, the Italy of underdevelopment. It was a cinema of the humble and the offended which could readily be taken up by film-makers all over what has come to be called the third world."[6]

Grierson's work was invaluable to Latin American filmmakers who did not have access to resources for feature filmmaking and needed alternative ways to reach audiences. They took from Grierson not only the concept of the social documentary but also the idea "of documentary as a hammer with which to shape reality" (Chanan, 2). The Latin American cinema that evolved dared to look at the reality of Latin America and its people in order to present a more just reflection, or in the words of Marta Rodríguez, "the real face of [their] people."

These filmmakers found a social and imaginative reality which differed greatly from that which had given rise to new European modes of filmmaking. Latin American cinema had to respond to a reality that was founded upon an oral culture, a tradition of folklore, which incorporated a distinctly Latin American symbolic order. From its earliest moments in the work of Fernando Birri and the Institute of Cinematography at the National University of the Littoral in Argentina, New Latin American Cinema sought an authentically Latin American voice with which to portray the continent's reality. As Michael Chanan notes, the filmmakers' responses to this quest have been varied:

"Glauber Rocha's anti-rationalist tropicalism is one, the transposition to the screen of the traditional popular oral narrative by Sanjinés is another. A third is the method of extended investigation developed by the Colombian film-makers Maria Rodríguez and Jorge Silva, which also involves the community in the process of bringing the film to fruition."(Chanan, 5)

It is not difficult to see how Rodríguez and Silva, as documentarists, fit into the continuum of this search for an authentic Latin American voice. Birri sought

"a cinema which brings [the underdeveloped peoples of Latin America] consciousness, which awakens consciousness; which clarifies matters; which strengthens the revolutionary consciousness...which defines profiles of national, Latin American identity; which is authentic..." (Birri in Chanan, 9).

We can locate a comparable driving force behind films like CHIRCALES and LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS.

By working with the community, Rodríguez and Silva work for the community. CHIRCALES highlights a group of brickmakers in the outskirts of Bogota who, within the confines of underdevelopment, maintain a sense of art and artifice in their lives. LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS documents workers' awakening consciousness to the benefits of unionizing. The film presents a facet of the Colombian national identity, industrialized rural labor, to those living in the metropolis. Although the filmmakers have advantages which the brickmakers and the flower growers do not, they, like other New Latin American filmmakers, attempt to use filmmaking to bridge the gap. In films like CHIRCALES, CAMPESINOS (1976) and LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS, Rodríguez and Silva unite city and country into a Colombian people, a society with problems that can only be resolved in an united way.

This is part of the revolutionary function of cinema in Latin America as identified by Birri in 1967:

"The first positive step is to provide [a real image of our people] ...How can documentary provide this image? By showing how reality is, and in no other way. This is the revolutionary function of social documentary and realist, critical and popular cinema in Latin America By testifying, critically, to this reality-to this sub-reality, this misery-cinema refuses it...As the other side of the coin of this 'negation,' realist cinema also affirms the positive values in our societies: the people's values. Their reserves of strength, their labours, their joys, their struggle, their dreams. The result — and motivation — of social documentary and realist cinema? Knowledge and consciousness; we repeat: the awakening of the consciousness of reality. The posing of problems. Change: from sub-life to life." (Birri in Chanan, 12)

The "extended investigation" which Chanan attributes to Rodríguez and Silva stems from what Rodríguez has called "anthropological investigation." [7] The approach to ethnography places LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS within the "interactive" mode of documentary filmmaking as theorized by Bill Nichols. According to Nichols.

"[I]nteractive documentary stresses images of testimony or verbal exchange and images of demonstration (images that demonstrate the validly, or possibly, the doubtfulness, of what witnesses state). Textual authority shifts toward the social actors recruited: their comments and

responses provide a central part of the film's argument. Various forms of monologue and dialogue (real or apparent) predominate. The mode introduces a sense of partialness, of situated presence and local knowledge that derives from the actual encounter of filmmaker and other."[8]

LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS, like all of Rodríguez and Silva's work, results from extensive fieldwork and interviews. Clearly, the film's success depends on the interaction between the filmmakers and the subjects. Rodríguez and Silva examine the "local knowledge" and present it in a manner which universalizes the people's problems. By interacting with both the film's subjects and the film's audiences, the filmmakers expand on this mode of documentary filmmaking.

The incorporation of the filmmakers' experience into LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS highlights the ethical dilemma of interactive documentary. As the film's epilogue tells us, Jorge Silva died as a result of the tolls of his lifestyle. Viewers might infer that his health was adversely affected by the time spent among the flowers and the pesticides. Perhaps his life was ended and that of his partner, Marta Rodríguez, irrevocably changed by the experience of making this film. This would be an extreme case of a filmmaker's life being affected by documentary filmmaking. The truth of our inference about the cause of Silva's death is irrelevant. Rather, his death before the completion of the couple's last project informs this film, both how it was eventually edited and how the audience reads it. Given the subject matter of the film and the issues and concerns voiced by the women who speak within it, Jorge Silva's death echoes with a raw irony.

The inscription of Silva's death into the text constitutes an abandonment of

"the precondition of distance, transforming the detachment of a gaze into the involvement of a look."

This is what Nichols calls the "interventionist gaze" (Nichols, 85). Silva's death

"indicate[s] what stakes exist when the filmmaker chooses to act in history alongside those filmed rather than operate from the paradoxically 'safe place' of authoring agent..." (Nichols, 85).

Authorial intervention in this sense plays more of a role in LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS than in Rodríguez and Silva's other work, and here it indicates the constant innovation which has marked their collaboration. As Rodríguez notes in an interview with Dennis and Joan West which appears elsewhere in this issue, the filmmakers realized with LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS that the "militant film language of the 1960s and 1970s had become exhausted — it was no longer viable." LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS provides a segue into a new documentary approach, one which "retains the denunciatory aspect of [Rodríguez and Silva's] films" but which also incorporates poetic and magical dimensions (West interview).

LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS opens with an extended pan across buckets and buckets of colorful carnations. A female voice speaks a litany of all the beautiful thoughts one usually associates with cut flowers.

"Una flor, toda un universo. Flores, alegría, mundo de color, ternura, poesía, belleza, amor, fraternidad, amistad, lealdad."

"A flower, a whole universe. Flowers, happiness, a world of color, tenderness, poetry, beauty, love, fraternity, friendship, loyalty."

Finally, the narrator asks what the price of producing beauty is. The response is both spoken and written on the screen: "Jorge Silva, 1985." Identification of the author, perhaps. But it also hauntingly resembles an epitaph. LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS articulates its subtext from the beginning. The viewer can only experience this film with the knowledge that Silva is dead and that his death is a direct result of the production of beauty, either the film or the flowers. This knowledge is potent, informing how one reads the text and continuously reminding the viewer that film, like beautiful flowers, comes from arduous labor. In the last moment of the film, the importance of Silva's role and the gap left by his death are emphasized by a still shot of him, a medium close up in which he holds the camera. This frame sums up his position as cameraman and director. The film's epilogue further punctuates the price of production. As a mime puts a flower on Silva's memorial, the narrator tells us that Jorge Silva died in 1987 at the age of 46, his health broken by his "battle to show the real face of his people." The writing on the screen identifies the narrator, Silva's companion, Marta Rodríguez de Silva.

I have dwelt on the inscription of Silva's death into LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS before discussing the subject documented by the film because I feel that this inscription is integral to how the film works and what it ultimately says to the audience. Rodríguez pays homage to her partner, reminding the viewer that this team made some of Colombia's most powerful documentaries. Further, she admits her personal voice, as filmmaker and woman, in a manner which adds to the viewer's engagement. The filmmaker's life as part of the process of filmmaking has become inextricable from the "real face" of the Colombian people that Rodríguez and Silva set out to portray.

Like Rodríguez and Silva's other work, LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS allows the workers to tell their own stories, either in direct interview format or in a voice over. Talking to an unseen interviewer, the women seem to tell their stories spontaneously. Although LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS is not a narrative, it does single out a few women and universalizes their stories. The film then implies a chronology by the "lifestage" progression constructed through these stories. Knowledge of Silva's death foreshadows the possible/probable manner in which these stories might also end. LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS winds its way up a poisonous path, ending with a workers' strike and death — not of one of the women but of the filmmaker who sought to change the workers' situation by making it public.

Unlike other texts which depict Third World laborers, this film does not didactically point fingers or directly accuse anyone (such as U.S. business) of exploitation. However, the women's tales relentlessly indicate that blame must be laid and changes made. Blame is implicit, constructed so as to emerge as a conclusion drawn by viewers, not as a truism preached by filmmakers. The workers constantly say that the blame for perilous working conditions rests with an unbending management. They complain about management's insensitivity to pregnant laborers, bad working conditions and avoidable safety hazards. One man

explains the fumigation process in voice over. On-screen he dons protective gear which covers him from head to toe. He later explains that the women laborers, wearing no protective gear, just keep on working in the areas being fumigated. For the sake of a cash crop, management jeopardizes their health.

No particular flower company is singled out. The problem is industry-wide. The one man who speaks for management blithely comments on how smart and eager his workers are, painfully unaware of the health risks they are forced to take. Although his name is not given, he speaks Spanish with an obviously North American accent. The accent signifies social and economic structures. The filmmakers need give no further hints. They do not have to condemn the North American businessman overtly. He can talk himself into a hole, extolling the superior flower-growing climate of the Plains of Bogota, explaining that he has come from Harvard to found a cash crop industry. The North American man's accent is the rope with which he hangs himself. Alone, it identifies his difference from the workers and explains his indifference to them as individuals.

One of the irrefutable messages of LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS is that in the past twenty years the flower industry has changed the rural landscape physically, economically and culturally. The manager who talks about the region's flower-growing advantages could never see this. Instead, Rodríguez and Silva turn to workers' observations to explore how the Bogota countryside has changed since the flower industry has matured.

As in their previous films, Rodríguez and Silva deal with the entire process of production. Their project is always political but their work does not isolate a single injustice. Clearly influenced by classical Marxist thought, one of their major concerns is the entire production process. Here that includes the devastation of the region. Mother issue that they take up here is the organization of laborers. In dealing with all aspects of production, they have always sought to highlight the human effort involved.

The film gracefully brings women and flowers together. Intertwined with the process of production in LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS is a concern with the process (or cycle) of life and death. The life and death of the flowers depends upon the life and death of the workers. Since this work force is predominantly female, the dangers they face are inextricable from their potential reproduction of human life.

The first woman who speaks sets the tone for the rest of the film. She explains that she went into the flower industry very young and came out herself a withered flower. This is the first of a number of on-camera interviews, most of which recount the hardships experienced by the workers. This particular woman does not tell her story at this point but speaks about the beauty of the flowers and the damage they do to equally beautiful human lives. Such a generalization gives the film its political voice as well as its personal touch.

This speaker's voice and face are followed by an image of the businessman indoors, sitting on a couch playing with a single carnation followed by various images of the Plains of Bogota and the flower fields. In voice over, he speaks about his interest in the flower industry, how complicated it is to grow the carnations, and how the Colombian government had been promoting the development of export industries

when he first decided to pursue flower growing. His almost scientific rhetoric contrasts with the woman who opened the film and with the voices which follow him. In fact, much of the first ten minutes of this film sets up a dichotomy between the industrialist who goes about his business and the workers who realize that "like a flower each woman is born with a beauty that must be tended." The industrialist's blindness to the fact that the women wither while flowers thrive is emphasized by images of pregnant women working on their hands and knees and close ups which isolate work-worn faces.

The beginning of *LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS* depicts the first stages involved in the process of growing flowers. A greenhouse is built, pipes laid, holes punched into the ground and seedlings planted. Intercut with these images are first-person narrations spoken by young women entering the flower industry. A mother tells of how her daughter, against the mother's wishes, began working in flowers because they had "no other options." A young woman recounts how at age 14 her mother sent her off to Bogota to become a domestic laborer. After two years she began to look for other work; by age 19 she was working in the flower industry. Another explains that she entered the flower industry at age 14 and after four years began to have serious health problems. Another, who entered the industry at age 16, bought a bicycle with her first earnings and "then began to get organized and buy other things." For these young women, the flower industry represents a better option than domestic or factory labor even though they are aware of the health dangers involved. Seeking independence and financial security, all of these women turned at a very young age to the flower industry. They seem to have found out quickly that the health risks are enormous but none opts to leave the flower industry, choosing what they see as freedom over good health.

For the most part, the film's images alternate between the direct address interviews and images of the flower growing process accompanied by a voice-over commentary. Discursively, the presentation of the stages of the production process is paralleled by the increasing age of the speakers as well as by the intensifying seriousness of the health problems resulting from the process. Some examples: As a voice over explains the management's insensitivity to pregnant women, every worker shown is pregnant. The women kneel on the ground planting seedlings and pulling weeds. The voice over then tells us that the women are not excused from work for pregnancy without a medical note and that often doctors' appointments are hard to get. Women have had miscarriages and died due to the strenuous labor. A woman, in direct interview, explains that she lost vision in her left eye because of the pesticides used on the flowers. Her interview is intercut with images of women performing the same tasks that cost her her eye: weeding, binding buds, pulling leaves.

The flowers are harvested and taken to the cold room to be cut and packaged. A voice over explains that while working in the colds rooms, one gets covered with pesticide and mud from handling the flowers. The interviewee at this point discusses her epilepsy, which she believes directly resulted from working with the flowers.

On a narrative level perhaps the most frightening story is that of Mariela, who got leukemia after four years in the flower industry. The story is intensified by her fiancé's recounting of their courtship and of the doctor's reaction to the

engagement. After telling the couple that they should not have children, he asks the man if he still wants to marry Mariela. When the man says yes, the doctor responds, "Don't come to me in a year or two complaining that you are a widower." Toward the end of LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS we learn that Mariela is four months pregnant. The doctor has taken her off cancer medicine so the baby won't result a "mongrel." The implication: Bringing life into the world may very well end Mariela's life.

The frequent use of close ups adds to the poignancy of the verbal message. We see a series of close ups of eating utensils protruding from workers' pockets as they labor among the flowerbeds. About halfway through the film, another close up shows a bowl of rice in a woman's lap and her hand lifting the rice on a fork. A later shot of the workers on a lunch break punctuates the idea that the pesticides' danger is both external and internal, in short, inescapable.

Close ups also demonstrate how labor-intensive this work is. Women's hands manipulate wire and string to build lattices. Their feet walk up and down rows, framed by the watering hoses. Feet climb up onto benches and hands snap rubber bands around the buds. Frequently the framing cuts off the woman's head but accentuates a pregnant belly. The isolation of body parts does not make these women anonymous or without identity. It universalizes their experiences, making them "any women," not Jane Doe. And the emphasis on pregnancy broadens the effects of the problem — it might cause birth defects or other neonatal health problems. Also, because "there is no other option," the pregnant bellies symbolize an intergenerational problem, something that these workers would clearly prefer to solve rather than pass on.

After being grown and harvested, the flowers are cut, packaged and exported to industrialized countries. They are sold, like stock, at the Amsterdam flower market. Then they are sold by florists to people who take them into their homes. The North American businessman tells us that each Colombian flower is extra special because it has been handled "with pride by a Colombian girl." The "Colombian girl," in what functions as a retort, says that the flowers travel all over the world while the Colombian workers "get more and more ill until in the end we die because of [the flowers]."

LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS climaxes in a workers' strike.[10] Actually, Rodríguez and Silva filmed two separate strikes at different plantations. The strikes are edited together. They represent the culmination of the laborers' realization that workers have to take things into their own hands in order to better their situation. Strike footage is intercut with personal hardship stories of older women who are months behind in their rent and who have had to stand up to a husband in order to participate in the strikes. Intertitles provide data about the strikes in which workers took over flower plantations and demanded better working conditions. The voiceover and direct interviews are angrier at this point. The women speak indignantly about the maltreatment they have suffered and express their commitment to better their situation. LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS emphasizes the strength of the bonds between the women and their growing comprehension of the importance of unity. Another intertitle comments on the outcome of one of these first strikes — "the workers were evicted with tear gas and rifles without the management's recognizing their rights." Before the epilogue there

is a coda, an intertitle which reads, "Esto no fue una derrota, esta lucha apenas comienza. Amelia, obrera." ("That wasn't a defeat. The fight is just beginning." — Amelia, a worker)

LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS does not just document the workers' route to unionization. Its broader concerns are with motherhood and family. The workers' struggles, that is, the women's struggles, do not limit themselves to the flowerbeds. The film presents the infamous "double day" of Latin American working class women. The women cook, clean, care for the children, all after a long day's work earning the family's money. The voice over explains that frequently the women have to work and take care of their families alone because their husbands have abandoned them or are abusive. This portion of LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS speaks to the general situation of working class women in Colombia.

The women's struggles are the struggles of a whole class, not only a sector of that class. It is in this part of LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS that we can most readily see the concerns of Latin American feminisms. The issues for which these women agitate fall as consistently under the rubrics of "motherhood" and "family" as they do under the rubric of "worker's health." It is feminism that has thrived at the grass roots level, not unlike very early North American feminism, but it is very different from the feminism that many women theorize and practice in the United States today. We see encapsulated in this particular concern an increasing engagement of Colombia's filmmakers with women's issues — an engagement undoubtedly influenced by thirteen years of filmmaking by Cine Mujer, a women's filmmaking collective in Bogota dedicated to making films by and about women.

In making a film documenting the issue of the working conditions and burgeoning unionization of Colombia's flower workers, Rodríguez and Silva continued in their tradition of filming the "real face of the Colombian people." The evolution of their filmmaking style since CHIRCALES is evident in the direct address that the women and a few of the men make to the camera. Fundamentally, the major concerns are the same — to show the process of production in Colombia and the real faces of the laborers, to portray how the process of production is inseparable from the way the working classes live and what they aspire to, and to highlight the need for organization and reform.

LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS pays particular attention to women and their concerns even as it demonstrates how these concerns are intimately connected to the (re)production of life in Colombia. The women's concerns, the workers' concerns, are of national importance. These elements mark this film as a Rodríguez and Silva coproduction. But because LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS was edited by Rodríguez after Silva's death and after the completion of her project NACER DE NUEVO (TO BE BORN AGAIN), which concentrates on the lives of women in the mountains after a mudslide, we may not be remiss in attributing its focus on women's lives to an evolving direction in Rodríguez's own work.

NOTES

1. Fernando Birri, "Cinema and Underdevelopment" in Michael Chanan, *Twenty-Five Years of the New Latin American Cinema*, London: British Film Institute and Channel Four, 1983, p. 12.

2. Julianne Burton, ed., *Short Films from Latin America*, New York: American Federation of Arts, 1992, p. 56. Because production dates vary for Rodríguez and Silva's films due to various exhibition and distribution complications, I have chosen to use the dates listed in the filmography of *Short Films from Latin America*, the catalogue for the current American Federation of Arts traveling exhibition of the same name because it is the most recent and current compilation of data on Latin American films.

3. LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS is available for rental in the United States through Women Make Movies, 462 Broadway, Suite 501, New York, NY 10013. 212/ 925-0606. I would like to thank Debra Zimmerman of Women Make Movies for providing a review copy of the film.

4. I am indebted to Margarita de la Vega Hurtado for an illuminating discussion of this film and its reception in Colombia and abroad, as well as for her insight into Rodríguez and Silva's work.

5. Julianne Burton, "Jorge Silva and Marta Rodríguez: Cine-Sociology and Social Change," *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers*, Austin: University of Texas, 1986. p. 31.

6. Michael Chanan, p. 2.

7. See Dennis and Joan M. West's interview with Marta Rodríguez in this issue of JUMP CUT.

8. Nichols, Bill, *Representing Reality*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 44.

9. At the end of the film we learn that Silva died in January, 1987. This information changes our interpretation of the written words we now must attribute the opening litany to Silva's authorship.

10. I refer here only to the footage which remains in the final edited version of the film. See Dennis and Joan West's interview with Rodríguez for a discussion of the production process involved in shooting three months worth of strikes, the implications of international co-production in the editing process and the solidarity between striking flower workers and striking garment workers.

Conversation with Marta Rodríguez

by Dennis West and Joan M. West

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 39-44, 19

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Marta Rodríguez (born 1933) has never been merely an anthropologist or merely a documentary filmmaker. From her first film, *CHIRCALES (THE BRICKMAKERS, 1966/72)*, to her present work, Rodríguez has always shown herself to be a politically committed, independent anthropological filmmaker who uses documentary to analyze the living and working conditions and the world view of peasants, native peoples, and workers in her native Colombia. The subjects themselves actively participate in the filmmaking process by critiquing the documentarist's depiction of their world as the film is being made. Her documentaries typically take several years to produce because of budgetary limitations and the anthropological research required. Rodríguez' work is not completed when the post-production process is over. Since she is an engaged filmmaker par excellence, she attends to questions of distribution and exhibition so that the documentary is turned back to its subjects, who can then debate the film and better analyze their own situations. Rodríguez, then, like the other members of the New Latin American Cinema movement that arose in the mid-1950s, views cinema as a powerful means to analyze socioeconomic and political reality and as a stimulus to the "lower" classes and marginal groups to better understand and/or to transform their politics and their lives.

By the mid and late 1960s, when work on *CHIRCALES* was initiated, Colombia seemed on the verge of a sweeping sociopolitical transformation. Several independent guerrilla movements had begun to challenge the traditional power structure, which had long been dominated by the country's two traditional parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives. A major challenge to the power of the traditional parties was mounted in the mid-60s by the radical Dominican priest and educator, Father Camilo Torres, who came from the country's upper class. The charismatic Torres in 1965 created Frente Unido (the United Front Movement), which attempted to unite different popular movements in support of a common revolutionary program. When Torres' Frente Unido effort did not receive the support he had hoped for, he joined the Army of National Liberation, a Guevarist guerrilla movement. He was killed in 1966 in his first armed action. The priest-turned-guerrilla Camilo Torres exerted a powerful influence on Marta Rodríguez — both as educator and as a visionary leftist political leader.

All of Rodríguez' documentaries have been made in collaboration with her spouse, Jorge Silva, who was best known as a cinematographer, a career he began after

having worked as a still photographer. He died in 1987 after twenty years of distinguished work as a committed documentary filmmaker.

A brief descriptive Rodríguez-Silva filmography follows. CHIRCALES examines the hellish life of a family of poorly paid, non-unionized brickmakers on the outskirts of Bogota. PLANAS: TESTIMONIO DE UN ETNOCIDE (PLANAS: TESTIMONY ABOUT ETHNOCIDE, 1970) is an example of denunciatory cinema. The film documents the genocide of an indigenous group and explores the economic and social causes of the slaughter. In CAMPESINOS (PEASANTS, 1974-76), the filmmakers analyze the violence and exploitation long visited on Colombia's rural population. NUESTRA VOZ DE TIERRA, MEMORIA Y FUTURO (OUR VOICE OF LAND, MEMORY, AND FUTURE, 1973-80) uses fictional elements to explore the magic, myths, and legends of the Indian worldview. AMOR, MUJERES Y FLORES (LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS, 1984-89) exposes the dangerous conditions for women workers in Colombia's booming cut-flower trade. NACER DE NUEVO (TO BE BORN AGAIN, 1986-87) offers a moving portrait of two indigent seventy-year olds who must somehow get on with their lives after having lost everything in the landslides and floods triggered by the eruption of the Ruiz Volcano in 1985.

Colombian documentary filmmaker Marta Rodríguez visited the University of Idaho and Washington State University for a week during April 1991. In the course of her visit, the filmmaker was interviewed by Dennis West and Joan M. West. The following conversation draws on that interview and incorporates other remarks made during her stay. This material has been translated from the Spanish and edited by Dennis West and Joan M. West.

Would you tell us about your childhood?

Both my parents were from Colombia's Santander Department. I never had a father figure; my father died before I was born. The person who most influenced our upbringing was our mother, who was a very strong individual. After she got married she had five children, one each year. When she was pregnant with me, my father died unexpectedly. My father had been a successful coffee exporter in Santander, he had a lot of money. My mother came from a poor *campesino* background and worked as a teacher in a country school.

When my father died, my mother was left with only a small farm on the savanna near Bogota, where my brother and sisters and I grew up. We farmed there for five or six years. Growing up there, I came to understand that nearby there were four or five large ranches where the owners' children had everything. In contrast, right next door there lived campesinos who were very, very poor — almost living in misery. In that way, from an early age, I started to get to know my own country. I discovered that there were enormous economic differences and injustice.

When and why did you go to Europe?

My oldest brother wanted to be a physician, so my mother sold the farm and used the proceeds to take the family to Spain in 1953. Spain was very cheap then, and my mother had obtained from the Colombian government educational allowances that permitted all her children to study in Spain. In Spain at that time Marxism was a forbidden subject in the educational system. It was during the dictatorship of

Franco — military men, priests. Everybody else kept their mouth shut. The lives of the Popes — that's what you studied in Franco's Spain. And a little history of economics. After four years of this I grew tired of Spain.

And then?

One of my sisters and I left for Paris to find work taking care of children. That was in 1957. One day at the Sorbonne I met a Spanish workers' priest, Antonio Hortelano, who asked me if I would like to work with him. He put me to work in the La Roquette women's prison, where I actually lived for a year.

And I collaborated with this priest on another very important project — offering assistance to the many poor Spanish itinerant workers who were arriving almost daily from Andalucía. They arrived in Paris very, very poor — with their wives, their mattresses, their earthen jugs, their kids — with all their stuff. There was tremendous poverty in Spain at the time, so many poor Spanish laborers came to France and Belgium to work in the coal mines and agriculture.

This is when I became interested in cinema...

Do you mean because of cinema's potential to explore social issues?

Yes, because these Spanish social problems were so urgent; and I realized that cinema is an effective denunciatory weapon. And because the imagery was so cinematographic.

The train from Spain pulled into Paris at six in the morning, bursting with itinerant workers and their families — I found this scenario very cinematographic. For instance, one woman, who was looking for her husband, showed up with an address on an envelope that just said, "Belgium." She's got five kids, a mattress and an earthen jug. But she didn't speak French. She didn't know how to read, or even how to make train connections.

How long did you remain in France?

My family and I returned to Colombia in 1958 at about the time that Camilo Torres also returned from Europe.

How did the great Colombian priest-thinker-leftist political leader Camilo Torres influence your life at that time?

When Camilo returned from Europe, he began to teach sociology in the National University; and I became one of his students. He also began to organize field-research teams in Colombia, and he requested that I work with one of those teams.

My team went to work in Tunjuelito, one of the *barrios* on the southern edge of Bogota. Tunjuelito had started as a squatters' barrio populated by migrants who had arrived in the 1940s and 50s. Many of them had fled the political violence and poverty of "La Violencia," which had plagued the Colombian countryside. The houses in Tunjueito were very poor, and the district lacked a sewer system and other public services. This is where Camilo established a community center.

What work did you undertake in Tunjuelito?

I taught six- to eight-year old kids reading and writing on Sundays, because during the week I was taking classes at the National University. Some of these kids appear later in my documentary CHIRCALES. They would show up at school in very bad shape: poorly dressed, often with their hands sprained from having carried loads of bricks, and all covered with mud.

Every Sunday we'd buy the children illustrated books, fairy tales, erasers, pencils, modeling clay. And it was very striking that after school the kids would just carry all these things off with them! That's when I realized how eager these children were to escape from their sad world, a world of absolute slavery. Work was their entire existence.

At what point did your interests shift from social work and the study of social sciences to actual filmmaking?

I worked on the Tunjuelito project with Camilo for three years, until 1961. I had started out in sociology, but I got tired of all the statistics and math, so I switched to anthropology. Besides, native peoples and cultures were starting to interest me.

In 1961 I returned to Europe to study filmmaking because there was no place to study it in Colombia. I enrolled in a program of studies at the Musée de l'Homme [in Paris]. This program offered a specialization in filmmaking, and I was able to study with the maestro Jean Roach from 1962 to 1964. The methodology I learned in this program was very appropriate for the Third World. I was taught as an anthropologist how to use a 16mm camera and a tape recorder. Students learned how to make a film with a very small budget. And we learned all aspects of 16mm film production.

How did you meet your compañero, the late Jorge Silva?

I returned to Colombia in 1965 and tried to get into filmmaking. There were hardly any film production facilities in Colombia at that time. There was a very rudimentary production for television; they had a black-and-white laboratory. I tried to find help at the university, but without any luck. And that was when I met Jorge Silva, who was to become my spouse.

Until his recent death, Jorge Silva was your partner on all your filmmaking projects. Would you describe his background and interests?

Jorge came from a very, very poor family; his mother is an indigenous woman who worked as a maid in Bogota. Jorge had no father; he was a "natural" child as we say in Colombia. He had little formal education and worked as a bricklayer when he was an adolescent. He did a lot of things to earn a living. Finally he got a job with Associated Press as a journalist and got interested in literature. He was an avid reader, especially of the "Lost Generation," authors like Hemingway. He educated himself through his reading. And there was a very strong cinema club movement at the time, which is where Jorge learned about film.

Would you comment on your professional collaboration with Jorge Silva?

I met him in 1967, and he became my entire filmmaking crew. Our collaboration made us an ideal team. Jorge was a great cinematographer. His camera was lyric,

poetic; camera work like this I had very seldom seen before. And Jorge had a great passion for cinema; it was really his life. I never found another filmmaker willing to go off to film indigenous groups for years at a time. No other cineaste wanted to risk her/his life for the sake of making a film "out there with the Indians," as they say. It is impossible to find anybody else in Colombia with Jorge's degree of dedication and commitment to cinema.

Did you and Jorge write the scripts for your documentaries together?

Yes. We did everything together from the very beginning of each project. On each film we first did field work, still photos, and tape recordings; then the elaboration of the script; and finally the filming and the editing. Everything we did together — even production and distribution. Collaborative filmmaking like this was common in Latin America in the 1960s.

How long did the production of LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS take?

Four years. It took that long because of the specific methodology we employ.

Could you explain this methodology?

I am an anthropologist, and the film was made as an anthropological investigation. In the last stage of investigation, we never film anything. The first thing we do is an anthropological survey.

Because of the repression of women workers in Colombia, a very delicate problem is posed for documentary filmmakers. A filmmaker can't just show up and start to film without people asking, "Why are you filming, and what are you going to do with your film?"

First of all the women workers asked to see CHIRCALES to get an idea of our previous work. It is important for working-class subjects to develop some confidence in the filmmakers. This is a long-term job. A filmmaker can't gain their confidence in just a week or a month. The idea is for filmmakers and subjects to get to know each other. The filmmaker must gain their confidence before beginning to film; we're not reporters showing up with a microphone and asking, "Do you work a lot?" "Are you underpaid?" So each of our documentaries has undergone a long production history.

For LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS, some of the women we filmed came to my house, looked at the footage on the moviola, and discussed the editing process. As a result, some of them asked to be removed from the film entirely. They were afraid of losing their jobs when the film came out. So our work depends on the participation of our subjects. We only began filming after six months of fieldwork and interviews. This is the same methodology we had used for CHIRCALES and our other documentaries.

How was the controversial LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS funded?

LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS received the support of the Interamerican Foundation, which is based in the United States. But, when they saw the film, they really got upset about it. The Foundation requested that its name be stricken from the credits. They claimed that it was a political film, a propaganda piece. But the

principal economic support for the film was provided by Channel Four in Great Britain. Channel Four is great! Really cooperative! Channel Four has given money to lots of Latin American filmmakers to make their films.

Has LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS been shown in Europe?

Yes, the film has already been shown on English television. Also, we toured Germany with LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS; this tour was an effort to denounce pesticides and the chemical companies, such as Bayer, that produce them. The pesticides mentioned in the film are not used in Germany; they are exported to the Third World. These pesticides are given a very special name: "the poor people's atomic bomb."

How did you obtain permission from the flower growers to film their operations?

In general, we sent letters to the growers, stressing the importance of the industry. Thus it was possible to film some of the growing operations. And there was an anthropologist collaborating with us on the film; his father had a flower-growing business. This connection allowed us to film certain activities that we had been banned from filming elsewhere. This anthropologist later requested that his name be removed from the film because he did not like the fact that we were denouncing what was happening with the pesticides.

How many flower-growing operations are there, and what is the nationality of the companies?

There are something like sixty companies — Japanese, German, Swiss, Argentine, Colombian, and American. Many companies have moved in because the land is so fertile and labor power is so cheap. And the cut-flower industry brings a lot of foreign currency into Colombia.

What does a job in the cut-flower industry represent for these women workers?

The women say that they go into the industry thinking that the work will be good, because it looks more appealing than going into domestic service and becoming a *sirvienta*. A *sirvienta* is a poor woman from the countryside who works as a live-in maid for families in Bogota. This type of work is very enslaving. Maids don't even receive any type of social security. So getting a job in the flower industry, where they understood they would receive social security benefits, represented a liberation for a lot of these women. The problem was that they did not realize their health would be so damaged by the industry's use of pesticides.

What other types of employment exist for women who live on the savanna around Bogota?

There is very little industry. There are some dairy and cattle operations, but they hire mostly men. Therefore, it is important to the women that the flower industry continue as a source of employment for them. They could get into garment making. And, there is a large ceramics plant that has work for women. However, the degree of air pollution is very high in that plant because clay is the primary material.

There is work for women in Bogota's textile industry. When the women in the

flower industry were on strike in the film, women workers in the textile industry were also striking. Both groups of strikers made common cause. In the mills employment is also very bad for women because of environmental and health hazards. The conditions for women workers in Colombian industry are still very difficult.

What health hazards did you document in the cut-flower industry?

The industry has a regulation that the men who fumigate must be rotated every three or four months because the human body cannot be exposed for long to such a high level of toxicity. However, an anthropological study that I've just been reading indicates that the women who sort the flowers suffer the highest degree of toxic poisoning. When the flowers come in, they are loaded with pesticide; and few workers wear gloves. Masks are ill-fitting and sometimes torn. The uniforms are very inadequate. And you saw in the film that knives and forks are simply carried [uncovered] in the workers' pockets. Of course this all depends on the specific companies.

Another problem is children born with genetic defects. The pesticides become concentrated in the mother's milk. There is, for instance, a high occurrence of children born with harelip.

What legal problems and other hassles did you have after LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS was shown?

The growers hate this film. They say that it's all lies, that it's not scientific, that the film was made to eliminate the export market for Colombian cut flowers. They said I was a person with no morals. When I was finishing postproduction of the film in London, the Colombian Embassy accused me of trying to do away with the market for Colombian cut flowers. They copied the film from English television; and the growers began calling and interrogating the women workers who had appeared in the film. For example, the woman who had lost her eye was interrogated; and she became very afraid that she would lose her job.

What positive effects did your documentary have on the cut-flower industry?

We were successful in getting the growers to undertake research concerning the industry's impact on the environment.

What happened at the farm following the strike depicted at the end of the film?

After the soldiers had cleared out all the strikers, the woman who owned the farm liquidated the business. The women workers kept fighting, with the union's help, in order to receive their back pay. The owner paid what she felt like. The workers had also demanded compensation for genetic and health-related problems, but the Ministry of Labor did nothing about it.

Incidentally, the woman waving away the camera at the end of the film is the owner; she had just had her face scratched by one of the strikers.

It is unfortunate that you did not explore the strike in more depth.

This is the problem with working for television. European TV producers only allow

you fifty-some minutes for your film. So the coverage of the strike was very limited. In actuality we had filmed the strike over a three-month period. It was much more complex than what we were able to depict in the film. This is a real problem now for Latin American cinema: much of it is being produced by television. The original version of our film lasted ninety minutes; television cut out forty minutes.

Did you personally edit LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS?

I started the editing process with Jorge. Our original cut lasted three and a half hours. Then I had to travel to England and further edit the film with persons who, culturally, didn't know anything about Colombia. It was hard to work with them because they did not know the inside story. It was difficult to finish the film because the British producers insisted on a length of fifty-two minutes or nothing at all. You can tell in the final version that the interviews have been somewhat shortened. This is a problem, when European TV producers meddle in the work of the documentary filmmaker — they want to impose cultural and narrative models that are not ours. That's *the* problem we had producing this film.

Would you comment on the accusation one woman makes in LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS to the effect that husbands don't work.

Some men work, some don't. But the problem is men have several families [concurrently]. Look, I'm not saying that men are inherently irresponsible. This is a violent society that makes men act in a violent manner towards their own families. Men get bored with the burden of children, and they go off in search of a more comfortable life for themselves. They'll go off with a younger woman, or one who has more money. That happens a lot. Most of the women in the film lived as single mothers with their children.

You have said that each time you finish a film, you give it back to the people who appear in it. What do you mean by this?

We give them video copies for purposes of popular education. For instance, video copies of LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS have been used in community workshops on occupational health in order to teach people how to defend themselves from pesticides.

Some critics have charged that while you explore serious socio-economic issues in-depth in CHIRCALES and LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS, you offer no solutions to those problems. How would you answer those critics?

In FLOWERS a woman worker exclaims, "This struggle is just beginning!" The solution lies with the unionization of working class people. After CHIRCALES was finished, a brickmakers' union was organized. Many students at the National University saw CHIRCALES, with the result that many people went out to work with the brickmakers: lawyers, social workers, etc. They implemented certain union activities for the brickmakers. And when LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS was finished, we took it on a tour of Germany.

The films, then, initiate a process. For instance, in the everyday world depicted in CHIRCALES, people were very accustomed to the idea of children working. But when these same people saw child labor depicted on the screen, it had a

tremendous impact on them. We were able to bring about distancing and a certain level of analysis. Talk to the Castañeda family [whose members appear in CHIRCALES] today; they now have a very critical vision of the slavery in which they used to subsist.

What do you see as the most important problems and challenges facing independent Colombian filmmakers at this time?

First of all, it's very difficult now to come up with money to produce a film. Years ago, when we made CHIRCALES, it won festival prizes and sold many prints in Europe. Back then Latin American cinema was fashionable in Europe. Nowadays people want to see Eastern cinema [*Cine del Este*], because it is certainly important; but Latin American cinema has fallen out of fashion in Europe. At least that's what they tell me in France.

Secondly, conditions in Colombia have become very dangerous because the drug traffic has unleashed a generalized state of war throughout the country. To film now in indigenous or peasant areas is practically to risk one's life; fifty-some journalists have been killed in this drug war. In certain regions paramilitary groups, guerrillas, and drug traffickers all operate. Filmmakers have to seek out small spaces [*pequeños espacios*] in which to work.

How has your approach to your material evolved over the years?

During the filming of LOVE, WOMEN AND FLOWERS, Jorge and I realized that the militant film language of the 1960s and 1970s had become exhausted — it was no longer viable. Jorge suggested that we retain the denunciatory aspect of our films, but that we also look for poetic and magical dimensions. In NUESTRA VOZ DE TIERRA, we undertook "documentalized fiction" [*ficción documental*]. NUESTRA VOZ DE TIERRA has an entire mythical dimension, and we actually began to use and direct actors. So we were really undertaking fiction filmmaking; we were directing actors.

And in NACER DE NUEVO our language really changes. There is a denunciatory aspect, but it's wrapped up in the poetic and magical dimensions of the protagonist's world. Jorge was always searching for new approaches to our material.

What films and filmmakers have most influenced your work?

I would say the French school, such as Jean Vigo's L'ATALANTE and ZERO DE CONDUIT. Also Buñuel's LAS HURDES, and Flaherty's MOANA and NANOOK. LAS HURDES influenced the editing of CHIRCALES. And Jorge had been profoundly influenced by Italian neorealism.

How has being a woman influenced your filmmaking?

In Colombia in the 1970s a women's movement, influenced by the Americans — women's liberation and all that — became popular. But I have never belonged to the feminist movement. You see, I work with indigenous and peasant groups, and people living in neighborhoods [*barrios*], whose cultures do not recognize these feminist values. For example, I spoke with an indigenous woman in the Cauca

region about creating women's groups, but such groups aren't necessary because a collective culture exists in that region. Women and children are integrated into everything. So I think that these feminist movements, with their American ideology, have not been important to me. I have never been a feminist.

Women's lives in Latin American societies do interest me: the "double day," housework, childcare, economic burdens, and violence against women — particularly those living in poverty-stricken areas. The situation of women in Latin America is very precarious.

Would you describe your future filmmaking projects?

One project is a feature-length film-essay [*cine-ensayo*] that will recuperate the philosophy of Camilo Torres. This will not be a traditional biography — Francisco Norden has already done that. Jorge and I have filmed twenty years of worker, student, peasant, and indigenous struggles in Colombia. Our sociological-anthropological-political film-essay will draw on our own footage and other archival material to explore Camilo's philosophy and major historical issues such as "La Violencia" in the 1940s and its relation to the violence that plagues our country today.

Another documentary project is already well underway. This is a feature-length anthropological study of the Colombian guerrilla movement; it examines the figure of the guerrilla leader Tiro Fijo and explores the involvement of women and children in the movement. We Latin American anthropologists and sociologists must study the origins of Colombian guerrilla movements. We have to do this not from a leftist nor a militant perspective, which would blind us, but rather from an anthropological point of view.

NOTES

1. Colombia's deep-rooted tradition of political violence dates from the mid-19th century. "La Violencia" refers to a period from the late 1940s to the mid 1950s or early 1960s during which tens of thousands of Colombians died violently in acts of banditry, local or regional feuds, and a civil war between liberal and conservative factions.

2. Norden's feature length CAMILO, EL CURA GUERRILLERO (CAMILO, THE GUERRILLA PRIEST) dates from 1974.

3. Tiro Fijo (Sure Shot) is the nickname of Manuel Marulanda Velez, the leader of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC), an orthodox communist guerrilla movement founded in 1966.

U.S. Latinos and film: introduction El hilo latino: representation, identity and national culture

by Chon A. Noriega, Guest Editor

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 45-50

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While it is now fashionable to dismiss the "image of" studies of an earlier generation of film scholars, it is ironic that Latinos lack an "image of" book within the field and, perhaps as a consequence, are not "reflected" in current film theories, criticisms, and histories.[1][[open notes in new window](#)] Even when issues of identity and identification seem to settle upon a Latino "image," say Pearl Chavez in *DUEL IN THE SUN*, there is no mention of a Latina identity, one inflected by the star-driven masquerade of racial and gender difference.[2] It is, to quote Adrienne Rich, "as if you looked into the mirror and saw nothing," leaving one in the unenviable position of defiant invisibility or of reforming something that is just plain wrong.[3] The emergent Latino film criticism, then, must engage in a "politics of representation" to the second degree, concerned not just with issues of "Latino" representation and self-representation within the media, but also with the possibilities for the articulation of such critiques within academia itself.

At the most basic level, Latino film criticism encounters a field with a limited appreciation of ethnic studies, history, social sciences, and, oddly enough, the other visual arts. That literature and literary theory serve as the lingua franca for the field, of course, says as much about its institutional development vis-à-vis English Departments as it does about its "racial formation" within the post-civil rights university.[4] This leaves one to wonder about the applicability to cinema studies of Kenneth Burke's notion of literary debates as a "heated discussion" that unfolds in an eternal parlor, where one necessarily enters and leaves in *medias res*. [5] While one may be able to find another, more progressive metaphor — one sensitive to class, gender, and racial connotations — there would no doubt remain certain historicist assumptions about the arrival and assimilation of "new" topics and approaches. But consider that scholarship on racial and ethnic "images" emerged in the departments and disciplines cited above, while at the same time "the field" developed elsewhere, in English Departments, Communication, and Film Schools. Thus, a linear narrative for the discipline, cast in the terms of European immigration and assimilation, obscures the fact that debates over representation have taken place in other rooms, other buildings, other communities.

One such "other" space can be found in the alternative Latino film festivals, which

originated in Chicano, Puerto Rican and Cuban American communities as a response to invisibility in the mainstream. Since the early 1970s, these forums have played a central role in articulating issues of Latino representation and self-representation within historical, cultural, racial and political contexts. But while the festivals, along with professional groups and coalitions, provided an institutional basis for a "Latino" cinema, the films themselves often dealt with the thematics and aesthetics of isolated Latino groups.

Thus, in the early 1990s, the festivals became the site for the question: Is there "un hilo latino" that connects these works to each other? At the 1990 CineFestival in San Antonio, Texas, Latino scholars and filmmakers addressed the question, "What is Hispanic Cinema?" A year later, the debate continued in New York at the National Latino Film and Video Festival, this time centered on the question of whether the Latin American concept of "mestizaje" provided an adequate framework for the various Latino cinemas, one based on hybrid racial, cultural, and aesthetic formations.[6]

Poised at the end of the concurrent Decade of the Hispanic and Reagan Revolution, these panels provided a timely opportunity for Chicano, Puerto Rican and Cuban American filmmakers, programmers and scholars to debate both imposed and self-designated attempts to construct a "Latino" identity. Such efforts can be traced back to two distinct impulses in the Americas: one in the pan-American political visions of Bolívar and Martí; and the other in the divisive racial politics of the United States since the 1950s. In the civil rights era, Chicano nationalism formulated a U.S. version of the raceless or *mestizo* continent of Martí, although the ends of such *mestizaje* varied widely, from separatism to cultural pluralism to a reformist notion of assimilation in which *mestizaje* racialized the ideology of the melting pot. But, U.S. institutions responded to the demands of Blacks and Latinos through the framework of the ethnic paradigm, even as reforms addressed and limited themselves to *de jure* or institutional *racial* discrimination. Thus, for example, the census categories for Latinos stress linguistic difference and European origins; in other words, ethnicity: "Persons of Spanish Mother Tongue" (1950 and 1960); "Persons of Both Spanish Surname and Spanish Mother Tongue" (1970); and "Hispanic" (1980 and 1990). Indeed, for Latinos, institutional and governmental programs often understand "race" as a matter of ethnic and class differences.

In other words, civil rights reforms undercut the radical ideologies of a "raceless" or race-conscious society, suggesting instead that race or color was not the real issue. In the 1970s and 1980s, neoconservative theorists were able to *rearticulate* these radical ideologies in terms of a "color-blind" society in which race no longer mattered, although neoconservatives avoided the logical conclusion that distinct racial groups would then cease to exist at some point. If overt racists proposed segregation and cultural nationalists countered with collective rights and *mestizaje*, neoconservatives simply denied the importance of race in social policy, but maintained its existence, thereby providing an indirect mute back to "separate, but equal."

In U.S. social thought, "race" is often substituted by other social categories, or made a subset of ethnicity, which helps to explain the conceptual slipperiness of racial politics. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant note, the ethnic paradigm uses

racial categories as ethnic ones when it comes to people of color.[7] In other words, Italian American and Hispanic American are treated as equivalent categories, although the latter includes Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban American, and a dozen other national groups, each with distinct histories and experiences, both in terms of country-of-origin and of immigration. Furthermore, the ethnic paradigm imposes a set of expectations derived from the history of European immigration upon racial-become-ethnic groups for which "immigration" was not necessarily the case: Indians, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians. Failure to meet these expectations, then, signals a failure in the racial group itself, rather than underscoring the history of slavery, conquest and exploitation through which these groups came to be in the United States.

The particularities of the Latino experience and its relation to the national culture have rarely been addressed in the United States, since the sociological literature and cultural theories on race and ethnicity are often formulated upon a Black-and-White dualism. If Latinos reveal the paradoxes and arbitrariness of such a dualism, it is in part because they have had to negotiate between its bipolar terms. In the pre-civil rights Southwest, for example, Mexican Americans were legally defined as "White," while socially defined as "Black," with segregation of public facilities and lynching. As "Whites," Mexican Americans were able to defeat school segregation attempts in the 1930s (you can't separate Whites from Whites, it was argued), but had no legal basis to confront racial discrimination and under-representation (after all, a "White" Mexican American can't complain about an all-White jury, or an all-White city council).[8]

But, conceived of as social categories, Latinos and Latin Americans are neither a race, nor an ethnic group. As an ethos or ideological position or cultural identity, Latinos are *mestizos* or a mixed-race peoples, although Latin America also includes all un-mixed racial groups and has experienced the same European immigration waves as the United States.[9] In addition, indigenous cultures continue to survive and contest the Latin American nations constructed around an ideology, if not always a practice of *mestizaje*. What then is the basis for understanding "Latinos" or "Hispanics" as an ethnic group, beyond linguistic and religious similarities (with significant regional differences) and a common history of Spanish colonialism and United States imperialism (with significant regional differences)?

The fact that "Hispanic" emerges as a U.S. census category suggests the difficult play between race and ethnicity, as the government seeks institutional control through homogenization ("Hispanic"), and social movements undertake radical change through the formation of a collective identity ("Latino"). Contradictions and ironies abound. In response to the question posed at CineFestival — "What is Hispanic Cinema?" — the filmmakers situated themselves within national (of being "American" filmmakers) and nationalist (Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban American) contexts. The supposed intermediary category — Hispanic or Latino — was rejected because, as each filmmaker concluded, "We are too different." In other words, the filmmakers could identify with "American" because they defined it solely in terms of *equal access* to the nation's institutions, whereas "Latino" implied a *cultural identity* that promised neither the access of "American" nor the cultural specificity of "Chicano" et al.

What is doubly ironic, however, is that the speakers had to situate themselves

within the pan-group category implied in the use of "we" — in order to assert the essential differences that made belonging impossible. A similar strategy had to be undertaken in order to secure access to national funding sources and distribution channels. Thus, for Chicano and Puerto Rican media professionals, the category "Latino"/"Hispanic" served as the imagined fulcrum for leveraging access to a "mainstream" arena for films about Chicano and Puerto Rican topics.[10] This strategy developed because — in the popular imagination, governmental classification, and mass media distribution — specific Latino groups are not understood in national terms. Latino, then, is not so much an identity position as it is the hilo/thread for a social movement to re-map "America,"[11] and — in a more immediate sense — for negotiating the representation of specific histories/identities as part of the national culture.

While the ideological and institutional struggle continues over the pros and cons of a "national" name for groups of Latin American or *mestizo* origin, at some point the various positions fall back upon a common narrative: the tale of the "sleeping giant." At the appointed time [usually, during an election year or census], so the story goes, the giant will awaken and lumber en masse to the nation's shopping malls and voting booths, pushing \$144 billion in disposable income and 13 million votes in one direction.

It is, depending on the storyteller and the audience, either a horror story or a romantic comedy, the moment in which the melting pot cracks, or acquires a *picante* inflection. If storybook and cinematic monsters embody or contain social contradictions — to be killed off in the narrative resolution — then the "sleeping giant" acquires its fearful dimensions from its conflation of the bipolar terms of the ethnic paradigm: assimilation and cultural nationalism. After all, from whatever perspective it is argued, the prophesied moment that the "sleeping giant" awakens is both the moment of its "arrival" in the "mainstream" (just like all the other immigrant groups) and the moment of its "racial formation" as a distinct sub-national market and bloc in the United States (unlike all the other immigrant groups). As it is told, neither moment can occur without the other, with structural assimilation dependent upon a collective identity and practice sizable enough to command recognition from and the transformation of the "mainstream." What the "sleeping giant" threatens/ promises, then, is the end of the mainstream itself. But like any horror film, the "dreadful pleasures" of such a scenario reside in part in the reassurance of its impossibility.

It is important to note that I am not talking about assimilation and cultural nationalism in the usual sense of an "identity politics" played out between these two essential extremes. In other words, defining Latino identity is not the issue. That is not the moral of the tale of the "sleeping giant," because it should be obvious that such a monster is more imagined than real: There are too many contradictions within the diverse cultures and political strategies grouped together under the term "Hispanic" or "Latino." [12] The question, then, becomes how are notions of *Latinidad* used for competing purposes at various levels of social organization?

What is of interest, is that both the dominant culture and Latino groups seek to embody the above contradictions within the allegorical figure of the "sleeping giant." And, as a consequence, Latinos are imagined or represented as "potential

citizens" rather than as actual ones.[13] The struggle over civil rights, political representation and cultural pluralism, then, becomes an agenda for some future date, with the onus placed upon a hypothetical image for the Latino community. And while the giant sleeps, it has no past and no present. Instead, political discourse engages in such concepts as "border culture" and "latinization," which offer vague (and unfulfilled) hopes and fears *for the future*. [14]

This is a difficult critique to articulate, because it seems to imply that Latino activists and intellectuals have undertaken a leveraged buyout of *Latinidad* based on its future performance (in consumption, reproduction, electoral politics). And if so, at what price? Perhaps that we enter national political discourse on an allegorical level, always standing in for something else. This goes beyond stereotypes, since Latinos cease to be "represented" by their own image. Rather, Latinos become overt and coded images for politics by other means:

"Popular ideology often makes use of racial themes as a framework by which to comprehend major problems, be they the declining U.S. dominance in the world, dislocations in the workforce, or the fiscal crisis of the state." [15]

With regards to Latinos, these racial themes and images are, as Arthur Pettit noted, "localized" [16] — the illegal alien of the border, the *vato loco* of East L.A. — which reinforces the notion that Latino issues are a matter of "local" politics, even as Latino themes and images are mobilized as allegories *for* the nation. Thus, the federal response — immigration reform, "war on drugs" — serves the nation, but not the Latino community, which exists somehow apart from the nation. While Latino themes and images circulate within national political discourse, actual Latino representatives are rarely part of that discourse. And when they are, they are represented as a "Latino sacrifice" whose proud heritage and bilingual skills can be offered up to save or redeem the mainstream. [11]

In the past two decades, it has been the Latino filmmakers and artists who have taken up the issue of a "politics of representation," challenging, subverting, and providing alternatives to the "mainstream." Latino-oriented media institutions and alternative cinemas emerged as a direct outgrowth of the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, as Chicano and Puerto Rican students, activists and community groups engaged in a decentered social movement that made few distinctions between art, culture and politics. The initial demands for access to the mass media sought a "tool" for communication that crossed the boundaries between political action, intercultural dialogue, cultural heritage, and artistic expression. Only later did the movement split into distinct professional/institutional formations within the state and federal government, the university, the film and television industry, and the arts community/market.

Despite the recent history of Latino-produced film and television, organized resistance to Hollywood's stereotypical depictions of Latinos dates back to at least the 1910s. In South Texas, Spanish-language newspapers published editorials against the silent "greaser" films, organizing boycotts against local theaters. [18] In the 1920s and 1930s, *La Opinión* in Los Angeles criticized Hollywood, while it also gave an account of the behind-the-scenes protests of Mexican-born actors Dolores Del Rio and Ramon Novarro. [19] In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Asociación Nacional México-Americana (ANMA) demanded employment of Mexican

Americans in the mass media, while it successfully boycotted or protested offensive radio and television programs, hit songs, and movies.[20] Likewise, in New York, dozens of Puerto Rican organizations responded to discrimination and stereotyping in the print and electronic media.[21]

Strangely enough, however, current Latino civil rights organizations and elected officials never raise the twin issues of representation and employment within the film and television industries, although these same groups are acutely aware of the political and sociological impact of media representation and, more often, non-representation. Instead, since the 1910s, the articulation of a Latino "politics of representation" has taken place at the local level, from the Spanish-language press to community pressure groups, and has been — as a consequence — framed in the ethnic or regional terms of specific Chicano and Puerto Rican communities.

To be sure, Latino media professionals and national organizations have challenged the industry over the past two decades; but, as Director Jesús Salvador Treviño concludes, these efforts have been constrained by the fact that its advocates also work within the industry and are subject to cooptation and blacklisting.[22] While these groups have not been able to change the terms of the debate within the industry, they have been able to effect relative reforms and increases in independent production and public television syndication. Since 1974, the National Latino Communications Center (Latino Consortium) has acquired and syndicated Latino-themed media to public television.

In the past two years, as a result of coalition and grassroots efforts, NLCC and the other minority consortia have been able to restructure into independent entities that also produce and fund minority-themed media. On a regional level, groups such as Cine Acción (San Francisco), Latino Collaborative (New York), Latino Midwest Video Collective (Chicago), and Latino Writers and Filmmakers of the 1990s (Los Angeles) have provided technical support, non-broadcast distribution, re-granting, and other services to independent film and videomakers.[23] Within Hollywood, Hispanic Academy of Media Arts and Sciences (HAMAS), National Hispanic Media Coalition, and NOSOTROS have lobbied on behalf of increased Latino employment (and visibility) within the industry. But, as Treviño and other filmmakers note, Hollywood studios and television networks remain intransigent in the face of these internal pressures.

While I do not want to overstate the case, it does seem as though film critics have a central role, if not a responsibility in these issues and struggles. The "politics of representation" is not just a matter of access and alternatives, but also of the critical frames of reference for Latino representation and self-representation. Despite the odds, more and more Latino work is produced each year, although distribution itself has not increased, and the press can do little more than an annual half-hearted proclamation that *this* will be the year of the Latino filmmaker. It is up to the emergent Latino film criticism to develop appropriate frames of reference that can account for the historical, cultural, aesthetic and linguistic operations of these texts.

What are the vernacular traditions and genres that Latino filmmakers draw upon or transform? How does bilingual dialogue and code-switching provide an alternative model for narrative structure and audience reception? Are there Latino "sensibilities" that inflect the film's aesthetics and/or reception? How do the Latino

cinemas complicate the historiography on Hollywood, U.S. independent cinema, New American Cinema, New Latin American Cinema?[24] These questions have an impact beyond the field of film studies, insofar as they provide granting agencies, distributors, and programmers with alternative interpretive contexts for Latino-produced media arts. This has become painfully clear to me as I have curated exhibitions and have also served on selection panels, nominating committees, and media curriculum projects, where Latinos must either fit the pre-established categories or risk invisibility and inclusion that is merely "affirmative."

In putting together this special issue, I have tried to include a wide range of materials that give insight into the topic: essays, statements by artists and organizations, interviews, and poems. The contributions can be grouped into four categories:

1. Overviews of alternative cinemas. Ana López and Lillian Jimenez provide interpretive histories for Cuban cinema-in-exile and Puerto Rican cinema in New York, respectively. Frances Negrón examines Puerto Rican women's film and videomaking, both on the island and in New York. Finally, Latino Collaborative and Cine Acción provide statements of purpose.
2. Several authors consider recent Chicano feature-length dramas that circulated within and subverted mainstream distribution channels. Christine List examines the "politics of language" in Isaac Artenstein's *BREAK OF DAWN* (1988), a self-distributed feature that later aired on PBS' "American Playhouse." Kathleen Newman argues that El Teatro Campesino's *LA PASTORELA* (1991) — which first aired on PBS' "Great Performances" and has since become an annual Christmas special — reconstitutes the "nation" and "mainstream" around the Chicana protagonist. Carmen Huaco-Nuzum provides a brief, yet provocative reading of Edward James Olmos' *AMERICAN ME* (1992), a controversial gang film. Finally, Charles Ramírez Berg takes a practitioner-oriented approach to the issue of "breaking into" Hollywood, formulating a series of subversive strategies for Latino screenwriters who intend to work within the Hollywood paradigm.

NOTES

1. My contribution as guest editor was made possible through research support and faculty development grants from the Center for Regional Studies and Southwest Hispanic Research Institute at the University of New Mexico. In particular, I wish to thank José Rivera, Tobías Durán and Vangie Samora for their generous support, and Eddie Salazar y Tafoya for his research assistance. In putting together this introduction, I have benefited from conversations with Teshome Gabriel, Ana López, and Kathleen Newman.
2. I refer, of course, to Laura Mulvey's "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's *DUEL IN THE SUN* (1946)," which is reprinted in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 29-38. In her critique of Mulvey's position, Carmen Huaco-Nuzum offers an extensive consideration of the *mestiza* spectator in *DUEL IN THE SUN*. See, "DUEL IN THE SUN: Mestiza Representation and Negotiations," Society for Cinema Studies Conference, Pittsburgh, May 2, 1992.
3. Adrienne Rich, "Invisibility in Academe," in *Blood, Bread & Poetry: Selected*

Prose, 1979-1985 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1986), p. 199.

4. Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that race must be seen as a "central axis" of social relations, rather than as a factor in other social categories, such as class: "We use the term 'racial formation' to refer to the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings" (61). See *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986).

5. Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941), p. 110-111.

6. See the festival publications, which include relevant statements and essays: *Tonanztin 7.1* (Jan.-Feb. 1990), a publication of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio; and *Cine de Mestizaje: National Latino Film and Video Festival* (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 1991).

7. See Chapter One, "The Dominant Paradigm: Ethnicity-based Theory," pp. 14-24.

8. Tomás Almaguer discusses these contradictions in relation to Chicano historical revisionism in, "Ideological Distortions in Recent Chicano Historiography: The Internal Model and Chicano Historical Interpretation," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 18.1 (Spring 1987): 7-28. On the first successful challenge to school segregation, see Paul Espinosa's docudrama, *THE LEMON GROVE INCIDENT* (1985), available through Cinema Guild.

9. This is, of course, little known in the United States, where historical awareness is often replaced by an unconscious nationalism. David Desser, for example, marvels that "the American [sic] experiment in building a culture has been a multiracial, multiethnic experiment unique in the annals of modern societies." In Lester Friedman, ed., *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991). p. 388.

10. It is of note how few Latino-produced film have attempted to define a "Latino" culture, history, or identity. Those that have done so tend to examine the place of Latinos in national electoral politics.

11. See Juan Bores and George Yúdice, "Living Borders/ Buscando America: Languages of Latino Self-Formation," *Social Text* 24 (1990): 57-84.

12. The debate over "Hispanic" versus "Latino" is never over who is or is not included in the category (both refer to the same aggregate), but rather over the cultural and political function of each term.

13. I refer to José Vasconcelos' phrase for the indigenous people of Mexico as "potential Mexicans" who were to be incorporated into the nation through language and literacy programs. Vasconcelos was the Secretary of Education (1920-1924) and author of *La raza cósmica* (1925), a philosophical treatise on mestizaje. See Susan Dever's discussion of Vasconcelos in relation to the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema, in "Re-Birth of a Nation: On Mexican Movies, Museums, and María Félix," *Spectator* 13.1 (1993; in press).

14. The fear of "latinization" developed in large part in reaction to the 1980 census and increased migration from Mexico and Central America. See, for example, Thomas B. Morgan. "The Latinization of America," *Esquire* (May 1983). On its cover, *U.S. News & World Report* (August 18, 1985) proclaimed, "The Disappearing Border," asking the question implicit in the discussion of "latinization": "Will the Mexican Migration Create a New Nation?" In response to these warnings, border artists, including the Border Arts Workshop (San Diego), described that new nation as a "third country" or "border culture" that offered a new model for race relations and intercultural dialogue in the United States. While the politics of these two movements are diametrically opposed, in terms of rhetorical strategy, both "latinization" and "border culture" base their calls for reform/dialogue on a doomsday vision of the near future, often anchored in the "empiricism" of dates: 1992, 2000, or that forecast date when Latinos become the largest U.S. minority and California majority. It is a strategy that — to borrow Robert Young's words — "asserts the Truth of History while constantly projecting forwards and deferring its proof." *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 33, also (on dates) pp. 45-46.

15. Omi and Winant, p. 112.

16. Arthur Pettit, *Images of the Mexican American in Fiction and Film* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1980), p. xv,

17. Kathleen Newman, "Latino Sacrifice in the Discourse of Citizenship: Acting Against the 'Mainstream,' 1985-1988," in Noriega, ed., *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 59-73.

18. José E. Limón, "Stereotyping and Chicano Resistance: An Historical Dimension," *Aztlán: International Journal of Chicano Studies Research* 4,2 (Fall 1973): 257-270. Rpt. in Chon A. Noriega, ed., *Chicanos and Film*, pp. 3-17.

19. Antonio Rios-Bustamante, "Latinos in the Hollywood Film Industry, 1920-1950s," *Americas 2001* (January 1988): 6-12.

20. Mario T. Garcia, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology & Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 216.

21. See the article by Lillian Jiménez in this issue.

22. Jesus Salvador Treviño, "Lights, Camera, Action," *Hispanic* (August 1992): 76.

23. See the statements by Cine Acción and Latino Collaborative in this issue; and Raúl Ferrera-Balanquet, "The Videotapes of the Latino Midwest Video Collective: A Manifesto," *Cinematograph* 4 (1991):149-152.

24. Cultural critic Tomás Ybarra-Frausto provides provocative explorations of Latino vernacular concepts (mestizaje; "recuerdo, descubrimiento, voluntad") and sensibilities (rasquachismo), together with their relationship to alternative media. See, the interview on mestizaje in *Cine de Mestizaje: National Latino Film and Video Festival* (New York El Museo del Barrio, 1991), n.p.; "Imagining a New World: Thoughts on Latino Media," *ImMEDIATE Impact: A Publication of Media*

Network 1.3 (Spring 1992): 2, 7-8; and "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in the exhibition catalogue, *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985* (Los Angeles: UCLA Wight Art Gallery, 1991), pp. 155-162. Bores and Yúdice (cited above) discuss the use of language and music in Latino, cultural expressions; and I examine the use of vernacular genres in Chicano cinema in Noriega, ed., *Chicanos and Film*, pp. 156-164.

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Cuban cinema in exile The "other" island

by Ana M. López

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 51-59

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"I carry this marginality immune to all returns,
too much of an *habanera* to be a new yorker
too much a new yorker to be
— even to go back to being—
anything else."
— Lourdes Casal[1]
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Exile has become a fashionable position from which to "speak." Empowered by postmodern practices that proclaim the decenteredness of contemporary capitalist life and by postcolonial theories of discourse that privilege the hybridity and ambivalence of exile — both inside and outside, belonging yet foreign — as a significant site from which to challenge the oppressive hegemony of the "center" or the "national," the exile experience — along with borders, margins, and peripheries — has become a central metaphor of contemporary multicultural artistic and critical practices.

Defining what such a position means for cinematic practices is, however, a difficult task.[2] Certainly, in the case of the very rich "Chilean exile cinema," we could argue that the socio-historical experience of political exile gave rise to a painfully postcolonial, often postmodern, "national" cinema: self-reflexive, nostalgic, produced outside the borders of the nation-state (often even outside the continent itself).[3] But speaking of other less clear-cut "exiled" cinemas in today's increasingly heterogeneous worlds filled with wandering artists and international co-productions is more complicated. And the task becomes even more complex when we seek to find such a cinema within the U.S., even in Hollywood itself. Simply being a foreigner — the "outsider" looking in — is not enough. Our common sense understanding of the term "exile cinema" would seem to require more than a specific positionality as "outsider." If we take the Chilean exile cinema as a possible model, the principal prerequisite for an exile cinema would seem to be a politically motivated diaspora; in other words, a "forced" political exile without the possibility of return.

In the Chilean case, the tragedy of the diaspora had a special immediacy and

political poignancy. Almost universally, cultural circles could respond negatively to Pinochet's regime of terror and sympathetically to the Chilean exiles and to their efforts to position themselves politically and culturally outside their nation. But the last twenty years or so has also witnessed the slow development of an exile cinema/video practice that has been neither as sympathetically received nor as homogeneously articulated. This "other" island, the films and videos of exiled Cubans, has often grated harshly against the sentiments of those for whom the island represented our only utopian hope in the Americas.

Certainly one cannot compare the 1973 Chilean debacle with the 1959 Cuban Revolution; if anything, the politics of these events were diametrically opposed and thus gave rise to very different exile populations. Nevertheless, the Cuban exile community is a significant one and cannot be dismissed. Despite Cuba's long history of exile (already marked by wars and displacements when it became "independent" in 1902, political and economic instabilities created mass exodus in 1925-33 and 1952-58), no exodus has been as massive or prolonged as the one brought about by the 1959 revolution. By some (conservative) estimates, as much as 10% of Cuba's present population (ten and a half million according to the 1987 census) lives in exile.[4]

This significant part of the "nation" is deeply woven into the history of a "Cuba" that exceeds national boundaries. At the margins of the nation as such, this community (which has identified itself in relation to the island for thirty-three years) functions both as mirror (sharing traditions, codes, symbols, discursive strategies) and as supplement. Furthermore, although a cursory (gringo) look might see the Cuban exile community as homogeneously allied to the far political right because of its continued opposition to the revolution, it is important to note not only its heterogeneity and its historical variances[5], but also, more specifically, that the exiled filmmakers are not necessarily typical of the more hysterical and anti-intellectual Miami/New York exile groups that still think of invasions and infiltration, hold fundraisers, elect presidents and mayors in exile, and draw up elaborate post-socialism capitalist reconstruction plans for the island.

Of course, that the majority of Cuban exiles overwhelmingly sought refuge in the U.S. also had a determining influence on their politics (a reciprocal relationship) and their cinematic/video output.[6] On the one hand, the politics of the Cuban exiles, especially their anti-Castroism, challenged the pro-Cuban Revolution feelings of most people involved in independent/alternative practices; on the other, as yet another exile/Hispanic minority group, they have had few opportunities to "make it" in the entertainment mainstream defined and controlled by Hollywood. Although buttressed by official U.S. policies and actions against Cuba since 1961, Cuban exile film and video-makers have, paradoxically, had a difficult time articulating their arguments and being heard. Within artistic circles, their exile has, in general, not been a privileged position from which to speak.

Their efforts to assemble a national identity within/out of exile — to reconstruct a national history — have often been seen as the marks of a strident ethnocentrism already compromised by their challenges to the island's utopia rather than as anguished cries of an exile's loss, liminality, and deterritorialization coupled with the paradoxical need to build — reterritorialize — themselves anew.

The exile of Cuban filmmakers must be traced back to Cuba itself and to specific

events in the island that provoked it. Immediately after the 1959 revolution, the newly formed ICAIC (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos) and the revolutionary government's commitment to the cinema attracted and pleased almost all of the cinephiles, technicians, and amateur filmmakers that had been active in the various (often apolitical) cine-club movements of the 1950s. However, a survey of the first five years of Cine Cubano (1960-1965) discloses that of the ten Cuban award-winning feature filmmakers mentioned, five subsequently chose exile: Eduardo Manet, Fausto Canel, Alberto Roldán, Roberto Fandiño, and Fernando Villaverde. Many others involved with ICAIC also chose exile: among them, cinematographers like Ramón Suárez, who photographed Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's films between *LAS DOCE SILLAS* (*THE TWELVE CHAIRS*, 1962) and *MEMORIAS DEL SUBDESARROLLO* (*MEMORIES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT*, 1968); actors like Eduardo Moure, who was the male lead in the first episode of *LUCÍA* (1968) and in *HISTORIAS DE LA REVOLUCIÓN* (1961); authors/scriptwriters like Edmundo Desnoës (*MEMORIAS DEL SUBDESARROLLO*), Antonio Benítez Rojo (*LOS SOBREVIVIENTOS* (*THE SURVIVORS*), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1978; *UNA MUJER, UN HOMBRE, UNA CIUDAD* (*A WOMAN, A MAN, A CITY*) Manuel Octavio Gómez, 1978] and René Jordán (*CUBA 58*, José Miguel García Ascot and Jorge Fraga, 1962); and graphic designers like Antonio Reboiro, who was responsible for many of the ICAIC's striking early film posters. [7] What prompted them to leave?

In print, several of the exiled filmmakers have traced their disaffection with the revolution to an event that provoked a national intellectual crisis: the P.M. affair. [8] In 1960, working independently of ICAIC, a group affiliated with the cultural magazine *Lunes de Revolución* (a supplement of the newspaper *Revolución* edited by Carlos Franqui) produced a short film for the magazine's weekly television program. A "free cinema" style exploration of nightlife in the bars and cafes around the Havana waterfront, the film was called *P.M.* or *Post Meridian* and was directed by Sabá Cabrera Infante (the brother of novelist Guillermo) and Orlando Jiménez Leal, a young cameraman who had worked for the newsreel production company Cineperiódico. Neither was affiliated with ICAIC. The film aired on television and received a favorable review from Néstor Almendros, who was then a critic in the influential mass-circulation weekly *Bohemia*. However, when the filmmakers applied to ICAIC for a theatrical exhibition license for the film, it was denied.

ICAIC's decision was difficult for many to understand. Those associated with the film and/or with *Lunes* cried out "censorship," while ICAIC maintained that the film was irresponsible to the revolution and that they had the right and authority to delay/prohibit its distribution. As Michael Chanan points out, this modest film about the somewhat seedy nighttime activities of marginal Havana types was perhaps only "mildly offensive," [9] but the historical moment — only six weeks after the Bay of Pigs invasion and Castro's official declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution — was tense and emotionally charged. The debate over *P.M.* reached such heights that Castro himself intervened in a famous speech known as "Words to the Intellectuals" that closed a series of meetings among intellectuals held at the National Library. His words were prophetic and have been often quoted: "Within the Revolution, everything; against it, nothing." [10]

Despite many claims that the *P.M.* affair was the decisive event that motivated filmmakers to seek exile, most did not leave Cuba until the late 1960s. In fact, while

the debate over *P.M.* did reveal that there were various political positions among cultural workers (and caused a restructuring of the non-cinematic arts scene centered on the closing of *Lunes*, a change in the direction of Casa de las Americas, and the creation of the UNEAC (Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba in 1961) according to exiled writer Edmundo Desnoës, Castro's famous statement

"became a cover and was translated into a kind of religious principle: 'Believe in the revolution and write whatever you feel like writing.' Under this watchword, without defining what 'within' implied nor those responsible for identifying when a work exceeded the broad confines of the revolution, artists and writers worked for many years...The crisis occurred when the security margin, the frontiers of the revolution began, as the French would say, to be put in question. And to contract." [11]

In other words, the cultural agenda suggested by Castro's "Words to the Intellectuals" was not in itself restrictive and led, instead, to a period marked by a certain creative anarchy and a testing of the limits of what was possible under the definition "revolutionary." The tensions that surfaced in this period (dubbed the "years of heresy" by one commentator[12]) among artists (primarily writers) and between cultural circles and the revolutionary intelligentsia would not come to a head until 1968-1971, when the polemic case of the writer Heberto Padilla caused an international furor which culminated in a formal "tightening up" of the definition of revolutionary art and culture.[13]

In any case, although Orlando Jiménez Leal, Sabá Cabrera Infante, and Néstor Almendros (who lost his job in *Bohemia* after the *P.M.* affair) left in 1962-63, few of those working in ICAIC left Cuba before 1965. The bulk of departures of ICAIC personnel, in fact, occurred in the period 1965-68. Thus, these departures — although perhaps traceable in spirit to the *P.M.* affair — were more closely linked to the series of events that began in 1965 with the formation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the internment in forced labor camps (called UMAP: Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción/ Military Units to Aid Production) of homosexuals and other "undesirables" and "deviants" (in 1965-67). Personally threatening some and morally threatening others, for many exiles this was *lo que le puso la tapa al pomo* (the last straw). (It is interesting to note, in passing, that no active ICAIC creative personnel left the island during the last massive exodus, the Mariel boatlift of 1980. However, among the "marielitos" were various former ICAIC workers, most notably Raúl Molina, a documentary director between 1961-66 who was fired from the ICAC because of "ideological conflicts" and worked in "anonymous" non-skilled jobs — farm laborer, gas station attendant — until his departure.[14])

Despite their scattered departures over more than a decade, many of the exiled Cuban filmmakers, together with others (too young when they left and considered "exiles" as a result of circumstances[15]) who became filmmakers while in exile, have sustained a specific "Cuban" identity: they identify themselves as Cubans, have most often worked with Cuban issues/themes, and, for the most part, maintain an anti-Castro political line. In different ways, their films and videos, especially those of the first and second generations of filmmakers, articulate and attempt to contain the traumas of exile by repeating and denouncing the actual

experience (the history of departures) and by symbolically reconstructing the "lost" home (with)in a new imagined community. In fact, their films often participate in what may be called a "Cuban" political culture or political imaginary that exceeds the geographical boundaries of the island-nation and that have been a constant feature of Cuban political life at least since the 1890s. Finally, the third generation of exiles, already less liminal and more assimilated, most often bypasses the explicit political discourses typical of the first and second generations, and is more interested in exploring that historically determining, but, in most cases, largely unknown "Cuban" part of their self-definition as "Cuban Americans."

THE FIRST GENERATION

Of course, not all the exiled filmmakers have continued to make films. Francisco Villaverde, for example, who was part of the Rebel Army's Culture Unit in 1959 and worked at ICAIC between 1960 and 1963 as assistant and director of documentaries, was exiled in 1965, worked for the AP news service in New York and, since the mid 1970s has been a literary critic for *The Miami Herald*. None of the authors/script writers have continued to write for the cinema and have found "homes" in academia (Desnoës, Benítez Rojo) or in journalism (René Jordán writes criticism for *Cosmopolitan*).

Many others combine work in advertising or publishing with forays in filmmaking. Orlando Jiménez Leal, probably one of the best known of the exile filmmakers, worked successfully in Latin advertising in New York, eventually setting up his own production company, Guede Films, in the late 1970s. Guede Films produced *EL SUPER* (1979), the first Cuban exile fictional feature — directed by Jiménez Leal and his young brother-in-law, León Ichaso — to be broadly distributed and exhibited in the U.S. and to win international awards.[16] (The "first" exile feature production was, according to all accounts, Camilo Vila's *LOS GU.S.ANOS* (1977?), a rarely seen, low-budget feature shot in Florida.) Subsequently, Jiménez Leal went on to direct *THE OTHER CUBA* (1983), a feature-length documentary financed by Italian television (RAI) and, in collaboration with Néstor Almendros, the well-known, highly polemical documentary *IMPROPER CONDUCT* (1984) produced by French television (Antenne 2) and the Films du Losange. (Because of generational differences and his split with Jiménez-Leal after *EL SUPER*, I have classified Ichaso as a "second generation" director and discuss him below). In 1988, Néstor Almendros teamed up with another younger exile, Jorge Ulla, to produce *NOBODY LISTENS*, a documentary denunciation of the treatment of prisoners in Cuban prisons.

It is this generation — intertwined with some of the second generation filmmakers — that most clearly evidences the peculiarity of Cuban exile film, at once closely linked to the island's cultural and political history, but the most different — especially in style — from the island's (ICAIC's) cinema. Their films articulate a contradictory, tragic discourse that mythologizes pre-revolutionary Cuba in order to radically differentiate it from the revolutionary "present" of the island and link it to their exile.

In *THE OTHER CUBA*, for example, Jiménez Leal devotes over half of the film to a painstaking retelling of the events that led to the triumph of the Revolution in 1959 and its early "glory years" (in fact, often using what looks like ICAIC footage) in order to set up its "betrayal" of the exiled ex-followers that he interviews

extensively. Attempting to write an "other" history to contribute to the new community's social imaginary (challenging what for many exiles is the U.S.-left's blindness to what really happened and also rehabilitating the political allegiances of now-exiled individuals like Carlos Franqui — author of *Family Portrait with Fidel* — who was once an ardent revolutionary and is thus rejected by the Miami exile community), Jiménez Leal must filmically relive the experiences, positing the authenticity of the struggle against Batista in order provide a link between the island's history and the exiles' "Cuba." [17] Thus by displacing nationalism from the nation itself, the film creates a space within which fetishizing the lost "home" (and *patria*) can serve to lessen the trauma of exile liminality and as a springboard towards a form of assimilation. [18] In doing so, however, the film — and other exile productions — participates in what Nelson Valdés has identified as one of the central characteristics of the "Cuban" political imaginary, the invocation of the theme of betrayal. In Cuba — before, after, and in exile from the revolution, interpretations of social and political reality are often dominated by the belief that one's opponent is treacherous. Political differences then turn into charges of betrayal. [19]

In other words, in "Cuban" political discourse, "betrayal" does not simply connote a move away from a given political program, but a breach of personal trust. For the exiles as well as for those in the island (as demonstrated by the recent Ochoa case, where high-ranking officers were accused of drug trafficking), politics requires unconditional personal loyalty, and any wavering or political difference constitutes betrayal. Thus the interviewees' insistent accusations that Castro betrayed his own ideals, his friends, his confidantes, and finally the nation itself, echo only too familiarly in Cuban ears.

Despite this explicit link with "Cuba," however, *THE OTHER CUBA* is formally very different from the montage style we have come to associate with the Revolutionary Cuban cinema. Although it is a kind of compilation, the film plays down the potentially dramatic value of its juxtapositions or the explicit historical provenance — and contradictions — of its archival images (for example, the film begins with newsreel footage of a passionate Castro speech delivered during the Mariel phenomenon that also served as the opening of Brian de Palma's *SCARFACE*) and instead attempts to weave a seamless, narrative "other" history.

The controversial *IMPROPER CONDUCT* also participates in this project, although not as directly. As B. Ruby Rich argued at the time of its New York release, "in place of history, the film offers myth." [20] Ostensibly a denunciation of the treatment of homosexuals in the 1965-67 period of the UMAP camps and the 1980 Mariel boatlift, the film does not share *THE OTHER CUBA*'s desire to articulate a historical argument (a *rescate* of the impulses and personal loyalties behind the revolution even as it presents a case against how it is presently constituted). Nor does it address a specifically Cuban audience (both films were produced by European television).

Instead, its denunciation of what were indeed tragic moments in Cuba's gay historiography is presented via assertions of historical fact based on personal testimonies. Weaving a history of unchanging oppression from exiles who left in the early 1960s through the 1980s and who have not, for obvious reasons, returned to the island, the film purposely mummifies the Cuban revolutionary process. The

very first scene already announces the film's historical scope and its historiographic strategy by juxtaposing public demonstrations against those sequestered in the Peruvian embassy before the Mariel boatlift in 1980 with newsreel images of and interviews with (male gay) members of the National Ballet of Cuba who sought political asylum in Paris in 1966. Nothing changes. Similarly, after establishing the existence of the UMAP camps, there is no mention that those camps were indeed abolished; in other words, that even within Cuba, change can and does take place.[21]

What has not changed in Cuba and what IMPROPER CONDUCT is unable to forgive is Castro's leadership. Already, the first sounds we hear (accompanying the credits) are a patriotic hymn eliding the nation and its symbols (struggle, the flag) with Castro:

"To struggle against everything. For Cuba with Fidel. For Cuba with Fidel. For Cuba with Fidel who is the flag."

Later, most of the interviews, especially those with the exile-intelligentsia in the second half of the film (when there is a marked thematic shift from gay oppression to general oppression), return to Castro himself as the demon-like source of all "evil," betrayer *par excellence*.

First of all, the strategy of juxtaposing clips from a 1979 Castro interview with testimonies and newsreel footage that explicitly contradict him produces the textual effect of identifying him as a consummate liar. But, more subtly, the film also presents a series of criticisms of Castro that are related to its own paradoxical project of attempting to link gay rights with the political right. If Castro is, as the people chanting in the film's first image seem to believe, the guardian of the nation's morality ("Fidel, tighten up, Cuba must be respected"), then he is also, according to his images in the film, an odd guardian indeed: effusively embracing another man (Kruschev, when they meet in Moscow), described as a "marquesa" (literally marquise, but the connotation is closer to a self-aggrandizing "queen"), criticized for not being married or having a permanent partner, and finally, as a supermacho man. Is the film's revenge, ultimately, to insinuate homophobically that the excesses of power and oppression it alleges are grounded in a masculinity problem?

Although IMPROPER CONDUCT had wide, international repercussions and is not directly addressed to the Cuban exile community, it does serve to create a discursive space where the exile community's political rejection of revolutionary Cuba can be simplistically reinterpreted as "politically correct" in liberal eyes. Thus, like THE OTHER CUBA, it can also be said to function to reduce the exiles' liminality and to promote their assimilation. However its reception was more complex, especially since a large part of the Miami exiled community — albeit liking the attention that the film focused on "their" side of arguments — deeply resented what was interpreted as a suggestion that the great majority of exiled Cubans were homosexuals.[22]

Completing the trilogy of denunciation exile documentaries, NOBODY LISTENS expands IMPROPER CONDUCT's project and addresses human rights abuses in Cuban prisons. The film begins with a quirky, somewhat disingenuous prologue: Jorge Ulla is on the phone, pleading with various Cuban bureaucrats to get

permission to import a film crew into the country. Finally, someone hangs up on him: the answer is obviously no. Unable to film in Cuba (something they obviously could not have reasonably expected to have been allowed to do), Almendros and Ulla position their denunciation solidly in places of exile — Madrid, New York, London, Miami, Paris, New Jersey — where they interview thirty or so former political prisoners and their relatives, including well-known figures like Huber Matos and Armando Valladares as well as many whose stories had not been heard before. Their testimony, presented in a series of beautifully photographed talking head shots, is harrowing. At its most successful, the film weaves these individual tales of torture and humiliation into an indictment of an all-powerful state that has managed to conceal these activities from the rest of the world. Its credibility emerges not so much as a result of the interviewees' acuity, but because of the palpable dignity of these abused survivors who unflinchingly face the camera and relive their pasts.

In a review of the film in *The Village Voice*, Enrique Fernández noted that the reception accorded to the film at its premiere at the Miami Film Festival was very telling of the film's impact on the exile community. In the past, Miami Cuban-Americans have not been very tolerant of former Castro supporters, no matter how much they may have denounced their former socialist associations in exile. However, during the screening of *NOBODY LISTENED* in 1988, at the moment when ex-prisoner Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo is asked whether a new Cuban political order should tolerate communists and he responds affirmatively, arguing that "Cuban communists are Cuban,"

"the theater exploded with applause...echoing a feeling...[of] young Cubans in Havana: a weariness with division and anger, a longing, perhaps naive, for brotherhood and peace." [23]

As Fernández goes on to argue, *NOBODY LISTENED*, despite its potential one-sidedness, [24] pushes the limits of what so far has been a narrow ideological field of cinematic dialogue. Embittered Cuban exiles seldom stop to reflect on how much their emotionalism, intolerance, and paranoia reflect with mirror-like precision the worst aspects of their antagonists' mentality. [25]

Thus the film also works as a melancholy assessment of the condition of exile itself, whether in prison, in Miami, or elsewhere: the inability to communicate over long periods of time, the silence of prison and of exile, the fact that "nobody" in the island or outside of it seems to listen.

That assimilation is a problematic endeavor filled with frustrations had already been explicitly addressed in Jiménez Leal and Ichaso's independent feature *EL SUPER* (based on a play by Iván Acosta). Preceding the markedly different denunciation documentaries, this is solidly a film of exile longing and displacement. The film tells the story of Roberto, a former apolitical bus driver who left Cuba in 1968 out of a generalized frustration with the system and ended up becoming the superintendent of a building in New York's Washington Heights. After a decade in New York, Roberto and his wife Aurelia are still struggling with assimilation: they cannot stand the winters, barely speak English, associate primarily with other Latinos, and are deeply disturbed by their teenaged daughter's (Elizabeth Peña) increasingly visible American-ness.

Roberto, in fact, is in the midst of a deep psychological crisis typical of the exile's condition: longing for a Cuba that never really was and unable to accommodate himself to the harsh realities of his adopted land. The film's solution to his angst — a move to Miami motivated by a job offer and dreams of sun-drenched palm trees and the sounds of Spanish — ends the story on a somewhat hollow triumphant note, for Roberto can never have that which he longs for most: not to have left Cuba.

Unlike the denunciation documentaries that followed it, *EL SUPER* displaces the explicitly political to address the experience of exile accommodation at a personal level. Thus, while we may consider the denunciation documentaries as part of the liminal phase of exile, this film that chronologically preceded them is paradoxically a film of assimilation that consciously celebrates an already existing new imaginary community.

THE SECOND GENERATION

Besides these better-known Cuban exile directors, a "new" generation-born in Cuba but trained in the U.S. has also emerged. Although there are marked slippages between the first and second generations, this group seems to cohere in in-between spaces: between the U.S. and Cuba, between the exiles and the North Americans. They are always attempting to "cross over," albeit in different directions. Among them are León Ichaso, Ramón Menéndez, Jorge Ulla, Miñuca Villaverde, Iván Acosta, and Orestes Matacena. Although their individual trajectories as filmmakers are quite varied, their partial assimilation has meant that they have often felt free to leave behind the explicit denunciations of the first generation in order to focus more and more on the nature of life as exiles; in other words, to wrest the exile's nostalgia away from the tragic discourse of dispossession and to recuperate it as ethnic identity — Cuban-American, but also Latino.

Certainly, León Ichaso emblemizes the "crossover" phenomenon. After leaving Jiménez-Leal and teaming up with producer Manuel Arce (and his production company Max Mambru Films), Ichaso tried to build on the success of *EL SUPER* to reach Hollywood. However, when their project to film a Cuban-American screwball comedy entitled *A SHORT VACATION* was shelved by Universal in 1982 (after spending two years in development, curiously, at the same time that *SCARFACE* was being planned by the studio), they independently produced their own allegory of failed crossovers, *CROSSOVER DREAMS*, in 1985. Starring the Panamanian singer-actor-politician, Harvard educated lawyer Rubén Blades, the film tells the wry tale of a salsero's struggle to "make it" in the New York City mainstream music scene. Like the tale it tells, *CROSSOVER DREAMS* is itself a crossover experience. It isn't Cuban-American, but rather a Latino film, deeply marked by the American experience and the values and narrative strategies of classic Hollywood cinema: it tells a story about Latinos in the same terms that similar stories have been told about other ethnic groups' efforts to "make it" in the American mainstream.

Ichaso has yet to make another feature film, but continues to work on projects that he hopes will "crossover." His latest is a script about the famous Dominican-born playboy Porfirio Rubirosa, a project also apparently being developed by another Cuban exile successful crossover, Ramón Menéndez, the director of *STAND AND DELIVER* (1988).[26] Not unlike *CROSSOVER DREAMS* in spirit, this rather conventionally told story about the real-life success of an East-L.A. math teacher

who manages to inspire his students to score exceptionally well in the math Advanced Placement test, is also a Latino film. Thus with these films, the Cuban-American experience has been replaced by a more generalized Latino focus that simultaneously reflects the realities of an assimilation that in many cases is already more than thirty years old as well as the commercial imperatives of "entertainment" films that aspire to mass audiences.

Jorge Ulla, another who was exiled quite young, has chosen a markedly different path. In 1978, he directed his first feature film, *GUAGUASÍ* in the Dominican Republic (not completed or released until 1982). Photographed by Ramón Suarez (who won prizes for *MEMORIES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT*), *GUAGUASÍ* is a lushly photographed fictional tale about the effects of revolutionary policies on a "simple" man who stayed behind, a *guajiro* or peasant who joined the guerrillas accidentally and, after the revolution, became a harsh executioner of his own friends, a betrayer. The film has rarely been seen in the U.S., although it was one of the three Latin American films (representing the Dominican Republic) selected in the pre-nominations for the best foreign film academy award category.

In 1980, Ulla directed *IN THEIR OWN WORDS* (with Lawrence Ott, Jr.), a 30 min. documentary about the Mariel exodus sponsored by the U.S. Information Agency. Filmed as the exiles were arriving at Key West, the film uses their testimonies to attempt to explain this sudden massive exodus and highlights the experience of leaving and the feelings of these new exiles. Perhaps because of the experience of working on *IN THEIR OWN WORDS*, and despite the fact that he claims a preference for fiction filmmaking, Ulla went on to make documentaries with Orlando Jiménez Leal (*THE OTHER CUBA*) and Néstor Almendros (*NOBODY LISTENED*), thus joining forces with the "first generation of exile directors and their passionate politics.[27]

Unlike Ichaso and Ulla, Miñuca Villaverde works in a very personal and poetic style and is one of the most interesting filmmakers of this group. After working as an experimental filmmaker in New York (under the auspices of the Women's Interart Center) and directing the award-winning shorts *A GIRL IN LOVE* and *POOR CINDERELLA*, *STILL IRONING HER HUSBAND'S SHIRT*, she moved to Miami with her ex-filmmaker husband Francisco and directed the documentaries *TO MY FATHER* (1974) and *TENT CITY* (1984). *TO MY FATHER* is a record of a Cuban American family's interactions at a time of crisis: waiting for the death of the family patriarch, the filmmaker's own father. Filmed in Texas, where the family home now is, Villaverde contextualizes the sad present with a series of images of his (and her) youth in Cuba. Today, however, the father is only a slowly fading sun in a system of relatives that attempt to care for him while they carry on their everyday lives and, in essence, rehearse for his absence. At the end of the film, flat landscapes and nondescript buildings roll by as the road distances us and Villaverde herself from the sad intimacies of the family home.

With *TENT CITY*, Villaverde assumed a more provocative public stance. Documenting the experiences of those Mariel boatlift exiles who were hard to relocate and had to live in Army tents under an expressway in downtown Miami for several months, the film chronicles Villaverde's own fascination with their marginality and dogged persistence to assert their own identities. It begins surveying the group from outside the fence, moving slowly into the grounds, and

finally, inside the makeshift homes themselves to interview and make friends with them. They are predominantly blacks, ostentatious homosexuals, and ex-cons with elaborate tattoos; outcasts with a will to live and celebrate — chanting to *santería* gods, modeling gowns made from linens and hand-me-downs — who had to leave their homeland and yet remain totally disenfranchised in the U.S. Their testimonies are, in many ways, more moving than those of the more literate and sophisticated poets and political dissenters usually featured in exile productions. After the final relocations, when crews come in to clean up the tents, we realize that only this film guarantees that the memory of the inhabitants of Tent City will not also be swept away.

Although more difficult to place than Villaverde and Ulla, Acosta and Matacena have also produced work dealing primarily with exilic assimilation. For example, after writing the play that was adapted for *EL SUPER*, Acosta went on to make *AMIGOS* (1986?), a low-budget feature dealing with the painful bicultural existence of a group of young Cuban-American friends living in Miami. Although conventionally shot and haltingly narrated, the film does capture the contradictions of exiled teenage life — Americans at school, yet Cubans at home — with great poignancy.

THE THIRD GENERATION

Yet a third group of Cuban exiles — what might be called the "Cuban American" or "third" generation — has been making its presence felt in alternative film and video circles. Among these primarily multimedia artists are: Enrique Oliver, whose *PHOTO ALBUM* (1984) offers a campy yet acute look at the transculturation of exile with tidbits such as a history of the evolution of the Cuban virgin and the exorcism of an overly-Americanized teenager by a *santería* priest; Tony Labat, whose *Ñ* (1982) is a fascinating and very experimental analysis of that letter's inscription of difference and a meditation on *mestizaje*; Rafael Elortequi, a University of Miami film school graduate who has done a number of experimental films; and Raúl Ferrera-Balarquet, a University of Iowa film school graduate whose *MÉRIDA PROSCRITA* (1990), *WE ARE HABLANDO* (1991) and *NO ME OLVIDES* (1992) offer poignant analyses of the difficulties and marginalization of gay Latino life in a North-South context.

This last generation — the Cuban-Americans — is perhaps the most distant from the exile experience as such. Certainly, their work is not linked to the usual anti-Castro political Cuban exile agenda. However their general concern with biculturalism (and the related loss, marginality, and difference) is nevertheless still couched in the terms of an explicit exile positionality — a Cuban-ness slipping into Latino-ness — that is unavoidable. And which, full circle, returns them to the mainstream of the contemporary art scene.

Although this generation is also the most distant from the island itself — some left as tiny children, others were born in the U.S.[28] — its work is, paradoxically, the most closely linked to the island's cinema. In Cuba, an aggressive group of young "amateur" filmmakers, loosely associated with the youth cultural organization *Hermanos Saiz* (and, in many cases, students at the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana or the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión in San Antonio de los Baños) and working independently of ICAIC, has begun to express similar cinematic concerns and experimental multimedia approaches.

Films and video work such as *UN PEDAZO DE MI* (A PART OF ME), Jorge Luis Sánchez, 1989), *EMPEZAR DE CERO* (STARTING AT ZERO), Ibis Gómez García, 1991), *OSCUROS RINOCERONTES ENJAULADOS* (MUY A LA MODA) / *DARK CAGED RHINOCEROS* (VERY MUCH IN FASHION), Juan Carlos Cremata, 1991), and *EMMA, LA MUJER MARCADA* (EMMA, THE MARKED WOMAN), Camilo Hernández, 1991) tackle topics that the national cinema has shied away from (respectively, marginality in contemporary Cuba, the excessive presence of Martí busts throughout Havana, Cuban irreverence, and notions of cultural identity) in a highly experimental and iconoclastic fashion.[29] For both sets of filmmakers, the expressly political — the revolution — is not a direct concern, but a decentered subtext that is subsumed within other categories of life and experience. Perhaps because of their youth, because of their comparatively similar exposure to different varieties of film and video work, or because of a generalized postmodernist climate that has reached into the island itself, the work of the third generation of Cuban-American filmmakers and the new generations emerging in Cuba share a common ground.[30]

In the long and complex history of Cuba and its diaspora, its film and video productions seem to have, partially, effected a graceful reencounter. There is now, it seems, a small "Cuba" that exceeds all national boundaries.

NOTES

1. Lourdes Casal, "Para Ana Velford," *Palabras Juntan Revolución* (Havana: Casa de las Americas, 1981), p. 61. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Spanish-language sources are my own.
2. Hamid Naficy has begun this project in his "Exile Discourse and Televisual Fetishization," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* vol 13, nos. 1-3 (1991), pp. 85-116.
3. The literature on the Chilean exile cinema is quite extensive, but for a good summary see, Zuzana Pick, "Chilean Cinema in Exile, 1973-1986." *Framework*, no. 34 (1987), pp. 40-57.
4. Peter Marshall, *Cuba Libre* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 242. Less conservative figures indicate the possibility that as much as 12% of the present Cuban population (or 1.2 million) lives abroad. See, for example, Ileana Fuentes-Pérez, "By Choice or by Circumstance: The Inevitable Exile of Artists," *Outside Cuba/ Fuera de Cuba* (New Brunswick, N.J. and Miami: Office of Hispanic Arts, Rutgers University and the Research Institute for Cuban Studies, The University of Miami, 1988).
5. The earliest exiles are, for example, very unforgiving of those who collaborated with Castro and the revolution and whose subsequent change of political opinion has not convinced them. Thus, Carlos Franqui, an ex-Castro ally, is not very welcomed in Miami circles (he lives in Italy). When he was introduced to the audience awaiting a screening of *THE OTHER CUBA* (based, partly, on his story) at the Miami Film Festival in 1985, the audience's resounding boos convinced him to remain in his seat rather than go up on the stage and face the crowds. See, Enrique Fernández, "Miami's Autores," *Film Comment*, 21, no. 3 (May-June 1985),

6. Various exiled film workers did not come to the U.S.. Most notably, Nestor Almendros who left Cuba to become a world-famous cinematographer in France and only began to work for Hollywood producers in the late 1970s. (Almendros died in Paris as this article was being written.) Others were Fausto Cartel, who has directed several films — LA ESPERA (POWER GAMES), LA ESPUELA (THE SPUR), and MARIA LA SANTA (MAMA, THE SAINT) and a TV serial (EL JUGLAR Y LA RENA / THE JOKER AND THE QUEEN) in Spain and Humberto López Guerra, who produced a documentary in Sweden entitled CASTRO Y CUBA.

7. Tracking the journeys of Cuban exiles involved with film and video is a difficult task. I have relied on personal knowledge, some accounts published in the Spanishlanguage press, and, finally, upon María Eulalia Douglas' *Diccionario de Cineastas Cubanos, 1959-1987* (Havana/Mérida: Cinemateca de Cuba/Universidad de los Andes, 1989) which identifies past and present ICAIC personnel (including those that have left).

8. See, for example, Nester Almendros, "A los Dictadores les Gusta el Cine," *Noticias de Arte* (New York), September 1987, pp. 10-12 and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, "Cuba's Shadow," *Film Comment* vol 21, no. 3 (1985), pp. 43-45.

9. Michael Chanan, *The Cuban Image* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), p. 101.

10. For the complete text of Castro's speech, see, "Palabras a los Intelectuales," *Política Cultural de la Revolución Cubana: Documentos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1977), pp. 5-47.

11. Edmundo Desnoës, "Epilogo para Intelectuales," *Dispositivos en la Flor*, pp. 539-40.

12. Maurice Helperin, "Culture and Revolution," *The Rise and Decline of Fidel Castro* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 351-353.

13. Padilla, an award-winning (UNEAC. 1968) yet disaffected poet, was arrested for dissidence in 1971. His subsequent public confession and apology, the ban on his books, and the government's refusal to allow him to travel (until his final departure via Spain in 1980) caused an international scandal, which provoked the first split between Cuba and international intellectual circles. For an excellent assessment and compilation of important documents see, Lourdes Casal, *El Caso Padilla: Literatura y Revolución en Cuba* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1972?).

14. See, Jorge Ulla, Lawrence Ott, and Miñuca Villaverde, *Dos Filmes del Mariel: El Exodo Cubano de 1980* (Madrid: Editorial Playor, 1986), p. 158. Molina, who wrote the preface to this publication of the scripts of Ulla's and Villaverde's films, now lives in New York and works in the Latin American Department of Associated Press.

15. In addition to those that accompanied their parents into exile, the Cuban diaspora also included a number of children and teenagers sent by their parents to the U.S. (between 1960 and 1963) in response to rumors that the government was

about to impose child custody laws that would give the State absolute authority over all children. For several years, thousands of children were met by the Catholic Charities Organization, which set up camps in Miami — Matecumbe for boys, Kendall for girls — and later relocated them to orphanages and foster homes throughout the country. This forced orphanhood was among the most tragic results of the Cuban situation. For moving testimonies, see, for example, Jesus Díaz, *De la Patria y el Exilio* (Havana: Ediciones Union, 1978).

16. EL SUPER won the grand prize at the Manheim festival, a festival award at Biarritz, and was selected for a Mostra at the Venice festival in 1979.

17. I use "Cuba" to refer to the greater nation, beyond the geographical confines of the island, that includes the exiled communities.

18. It is interesting to note that when THE OTHER CUBA aired on a Spanish-language television channel in Miami/New York in late 1984, the film's contribution to the community's social imaginary ("what it can teach the children") was what most interested the participants of the panel discussions among Jiménez Leal and prominent Cuban exiles (primarily university professors, critics, and community organizers) that followed the film.

19. Nelson Valdés, "Cuban Political Culture: Between Betrayal and Death," in Sandor Halebsky and John M. Kirk, eds., *Cuba in Transition* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992). pp. 217.

20. B. Ruby Rich, "Bay of Pix," *American Film* (July-August 1984). p. 59.

21. The film's U.S. release provoked a heated debate between (and within) progressives and gay liberationists too complicated to rehearse here. See, for example, in *Village Voice*: Richard Goldstein, "¡Cuba Si, Macho No!" (July 24, 1984), pp. 1, 42-44; Néstor Almendros, "An Illusion of Fairness" (August 14, 1984), p. 40; and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, "¡Cuba Si, Almendros No!" (Oct. 21, 1984), pp. 46-47. And also, Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez-Leal, "Improper Conduct," *American Film* (Sept. 1984), pp. 18,70-1.

22. See, Alea, "¡Cuba Si, Almendros No!" p. 47.

23. Enrique Fernández, "Nobody Booed," *Village Voice* (March 22, 1988), p. 42.

24. It is interesting to note that Almendros and Ulla waged a long and arduous battle with PBS to get NOBODY LISTENED aired on U.S. television. For more details see, Jacob Weisberg, "Nobody Watched," *The New Republic* (August 13, 1990), pp. 12-13.

25. Fernández, "Nobody Booed," p. 42.

26. Enrique Fernández, "Three Amigos," *Village Voice* (February 28, 1988), p. 34.

27. Despite the fact that he has argued that "politics is a synonym of paranoia" in "La certidumbre de lo imposible." Ulla & Ott and Villaverde, *Dos Filmes de Mariel*, p. 127.

28. With the exception of Ferrera-Balarquet, who was over eighteen when he left

Cuba during the Mariel exodus.

29. For more information, see Alejandro Rios, "Otro Cine Cubano de Hoy," *Cine Cubano*, no. 133 (Nov-Dec 1991), pp. 53-57.

30. Perhaps it is also important that these young Cuban-Americans have also managed to make "pilgrimages" back to the island itself, not so much to exorcise the past, but to re-encounter their Cubanness.

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Puerto Rican cinema in New York From the margin to the center

by Lillian Jiménez

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 60-66

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"Without a doubt, in order to stand on our own two feet Puerto Ricans of all generations must begin by affirming our own history. It is as if we are saying — we have roots, therefore we are!" — Bernardo Vega^[1][\[open notes in new window\]](#)

For many Puerto Rican film and video makers, picking up the camera was equivalent to "picking up the gun" in defense of civil and human rights in the United States after the Civil Rights Movement. The beginning of this "coming to self," as bell hooks describes it, was a burning desire to expose the terrible conditions under which Puerto Ricans of this generation had been raised; challenge the assumptions under which these conditions thrived; and recreate the societal institutions that had engendered them. In this war, images were a potent and vital weapon.^[2]

Through popular culture, distorted images of *bandidos*, spitfires and Latin lovers, brutish farm workers, petty tyrants and delinquents had burrowed deep into the collective consciousness of Puerto Ricans and the broader society. In effect, dominant ideology and its apparatus of representation indicted Puerto Ricans as responsible for their own conditions. In this paradigm, U.S. benevolence was a necessary strategy to protect Latinos from themselves.

In the late 60s and early 70s, a new generation of Puerto Ricans responded to these assumptions with, "*Fuego, fuego, fuego...los yanquis quieren fuego*" (Fire, fire, fire, the yankees want fire). In *EL PUEBLO SE LEVANTA* (1972), Iris Morales, a member of the Young Lord Party, a Puerto Rican political activist organization, says,

"I always thought it was my parent's fault; that my parents were the ones who had made this oppression; that they had made everything so dirty...but then I started thinking."^[3]

With this newfound sense of enlightenment, forged from experiential resistance and awareness of international anti-colonial and other domestic struggles for civil rights, Puerto Ricans reclaimed their history, and exposed, challenged and attempted to change their reality. Images were key in this life and death struggle.

While it has not been widely known, the first Puerto Rican migrants to the U.S. were deeply concerned with their depiction in the media. Through a wide network of civic, cultural and political organizations, these *pioneros* confronted discrimination. In 1940, *Scribner's Commentator* ran an article entitled "Welcome Paupers and Crime: Puerto Rico's Shocking Gift to the U.S.," which said,

"...all Puerto Ricans were totally lacking in moral values, which is why none of them seemed to mind wallowing in the most abject moral degradation."

While forty Puerto Rican organizations, including the Asociación de Escritores y Periodistas Puertorriqueño, organized against this article (Bernardo Vega, p. 203), seven years later the *World Telegram* ran a series of equally vitriolic articles. This too was met with a vociferous demonstration and picket line that stretched for several blocks (Bernardo Vega, p. 231).

An instrumental component to this resistance was the formation of hometown clubs to celebrate common roots and create a necessary support system and network for housing, jobs and cultural revival. A critical locus of resistance to the dominant culture, members could speak in Spanish and associate freely with Puerto Ricans of different classes who shared a similar economic and social status. Contrary to commonly held beliefs, Puerto Ricans did not passively acquiesce to exploitative conditions in these early years. There were numerous left-leaning and mainstream political organizations, composed of working class puertorriqueños. In addition, many Puerto Ricans were active in union organizing and international solidarity work, especially with Nicaragua and the Republicans of the Spanish Civil War.

While thousands of Puerto Ricans had migrated to the United States prior to World War II, it is not until the advent of intensive industrialization of Puerto Rico through Operation Bootstrap policies (late 40s-mid 50s) that hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States in search of economic possibilities. Settling in large metropolitan areas on the East Coast like New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, they occupied low income housing readily available as Irish, Jewish and Italian immigrants moved up the economic ladder and away to the outer boroughs and suburbs.

Unlike other immigrants, Puerto Ricans were citizens and anticipated benefits from that legal status. Racially mixed, they were more tolerant of behavior and relationships deemed inappropriate in race-conscious United States. Confronted by abject discrimination in spite of their citizenship and because of their racial mixture, they developed a survival strategy relying on the existing infrastructure of hometown clubs, civic associations and political clubs. To achieve educational and political objectives, they created new organizations like the Puerto Rican Forum and Aspira of America.

While these first generations of migrants paved the way through internal and external forms of resistance, their survival strategies were varied and fraught with contradictions. Years of ideological and political domination by Spain and then the United States had instilled the culture with a deep-rooted sense of nationalism coupled with political ambivalence. Some quickly seized the opportunity to remake

themselves in the model of the assimilated "Anglo" citizen.

The third generation of Puerto Ricans who reached their late teens during the volatile and empowering Civil Rights Movement, repudiated the "complacent" and "accommodationist" strategies employed by mainstream Puerto Rican political leaders of the day. Having been educated in North American schools, many had served as intermediaries for their family with educational, health and social service agencies. Having weathered the full fury of institutional racism, accommodation as such was the last strategy they wished to employ. Having been denied an identity, they asserted their presence in militant and forceful terms — theirs was the strategy of direct confrontation.

The Young Lords, The Puerto Rican Student Union, The Movimiento Pro-Independencia (the precursor of The Puerto Rican Socialist Party), El Comité-M.I.N.P., Resistencia Puertorriqueña, and El Pueblo del Vladic in the Lower East Side, just to name a few, were engaged in re-creating the Puerto Rican community, using as role models Puerto Rican labor figures like Luisa Capetilla and Juana Colón; nationalist leaders like Don Pedro Albizu Campos and Lolita Lebrón; and international leaders like Che Guevara. Involved in local, national and international issues, they galvanized the Puerto Rican community by traveling to socialist countries, taking up the issue of Puerto Rican independence, creating support committees for Nationalist leaders imprisoned since the early 50s and worked closely with similar organizations within the black, Asian and white communities. This generation picked up the camera in spite of and in defense of the ones they loved.

An integral component of this political ferment and awakening was cultural revitalization based on nationalism. As "cultural workers," artists of all disciplines collaborated to create a new image of Puerto Ricans through the visual arts with the development of Taller Boricua and through the poetry of such critical figures as Pedro Pietri and Sandra Maria Estévez. A distinct Puerto Rican identity, tied to the Island, rooted in the New York experience and shaped by the anti-imperialist ideology of the period, had emerged. Film and video images created by Puerto Ricans that represented the history, culture and daily reality of the majority of Puerto Ricans were missing.

To fill this void, *Realidades*, a local series on public broadcast station WNET/Channel 13, was created through community pressure. It provided the focus and center for Puerto Rican involvement in the broadcast industry and later in the independent film and video field. Community activists Gilberto Gerena Valentín, Esperanza Martel, Diana Caballero, Julio Rodríguez and others formed The Puerto Rican Education and Action Media Council in 1972 to protest negative depictions of Puerto Ricans and advocate for increased employment of Puerto Ricans within the industry. Joined by filmmaker José García, they successfully pressured WNET, by taking over the studio during an evening pledge, to establish *Realidades* with discretionary station money. Humberto Cintrón, a community activist, became Executive Producer. José García, who had established several community film workshops throughout the country for the National Endowment for the Arts, became Producer.

Retaining its local focus for two years, several important cultural and public affairs documentaries were produced and acquired by *Realidades*, including ANGELITOS

NEGROS, an in-studio dance piece about a *baquiné*, the African-based burial ritual of a young child; TOWARDS A COLLECTIVE EXPRESSION, the first documentary by Marcos Dimas about the philosophy and work of Taller Boricua, the visual arts group he co-founded; and LOS NACIONALISTAS, a documentary that reclaimed the history of Don Pedro Albizu Campos and the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico. An important developmental leap was made when programming exchanges with KMEX, a local public broadcast station in Los Angeles, elevated *Realidades* to national prominence. Chicano filmmaker Jesus Treviño's important YO SOY CHICANO, about the political consciousness of the Chicano Movement, was the first film exchange and it opened a dialogue between Puerto Ricans and Chicanos. Contact was made with Sandino Films, a collective of filmmakers in Puerto Rico, resulting in José García's JULIA DE BURGOS, a film about the life and death of revolutionary poet Julia de Burgos. This dialogue and working relationship with Chicano directors in the West and Southwest was instrumental in the formation of the National Latino Media Coalition which legally challenged the broadcast industry nationally. In 1974, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting funded *Realidades* as a national series and Lou De Lemos, a Dominican with experience in commercial media, took over as series producer.

During this period, *Realidades* served as one of the principle creative magnets within the Puerto Rican community, attracting artists from different disciplines to collaborate and brainstorm on a myriad of projects. Writers, visual artists, poets and film and video makers like Diego Echevarría, working at Channel 13 on another show and Diego De La Texera, co-founder of Sandino Films in Puerto Rico, gravitated to the series as a creative wellspring. However, a precarious funding base, uneven programming schedule and internal problems caused the *Realidades* series to end in 1975.

Initiated by a core group of activists and makers with varying levels of skill and experience because of the exclusionary practices of the media industry, *Realidades* launched the careers of many producers still working within the broadcast, advertising and independent film industries: Ortiz, independent producer, formerly with WGBH, Boston; Larry Varas, CBS in New York; Livia Pérez, independent producer; Felipe Borerro, sound recordist; Eulogio Ortiz, Assistant Director with McNeil-Lehrer, WNET; Mercedes Sabio, Program Manager, WOSU, Athens, Ohio; and Lou De Lemos, WNET.

As a consequence of the *Realidades* series and the advocacy and litigation waged by the National Coalition against the stations, José Rivera, the National Coalition's attorney, was the first and only Puerto Rican named to the Board of Directors of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in the late 1970s. In addition, several Latino based public affairs shows were spawned at commercial stations — many of which are still in place today like NBC's *Visiones* and ABC's *Imágenes Latinas*.

THE DOCUMENTARIANS: MEDIA GUERILLAS

Many film and videomakers chose to remain independent of the corporate media structures. The earliest wave of Puerto Rican filmmaking concentrated in the documentary format because of its relative low cost, accessibility and efficacy in visual representation. Newsreel, an alternative media organization patterned after the Film and Photo League of the 30s, espoused the theory that anyone could "pick up the camera and shoot" to create films that empowered people. Generally

influenced by this philosophy and other democratic principles of the media movement, a small cadre of Puerto Rican documentarians slowly emerged. Profiles of three Puerto Rican documentarians illustrate the motivation and problems faced by these independent producers.

Carlos De Jesús started out as a photographer until German television asked him to direct a film on housing in New York. This creative collaboration produced his first film, *THE DEVIL IS A CONDITION* (1972), a lyrical ode to Latinos and Blacks fighting to improve their housing conditions throughout the city. Made with a cache of liberated film, a borrowed camera, editing facilities and lab processing provided by German television, and an otherwise no-money budget, it was presented at the Whitney Museum and garnered awards at festivals in Paris. (It was recently re-shown as part of the series, *LA INDIRECTA DIRECTA: TWO DECADES OF CHICANO AND PUERTO RICAN FILM AND VIDEO*, at the Whitney, curated by this author and Chon Noriega.) Lacking personal resources and thereby requiring an institutional base, he helped found *Imágenes* at New Jersey Public Television and went on to make *THE PICNIC* (1976), a celebration and sharing of cultural values between Puerto Rican inmates and their families in a New Jersey prison. He continued to work in Latino series within public broadcasting throughout the country because the infrastructure for independent film was in a nascent stage. Currently teaching at New York University, he works primarily in photography and video.

Beni Matías received formal training in film production at La Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía in Madrid, Spain. On her return to the United States, she worked at Young Filmmakers Foundation, a film resource center in the Lower East Side that provided equipment access to independent filmmakers. Lacking experience and knowledge about funding for film, she collaborated with Marci Reaven, a New York University student who shared her values and vision about documentary film as a tool for social change.

They made *IN THE HEART OF LOISAIDA* (1979), a black and white documentary about early housing takeovers in the lower east side of New York by their Latino tenants. It was made essentially through in-kind contributions of equipment, labor and a small grant from Adopt A Building, a not-for-profit housing organization. On the basis of the first film, she and copartner Marci Reavens received governmental support to produce *THROUGH YOUNG PEOPLE'S EYES* (1981), a color documentary about low income Black and Latino children in Philadelphia.

While a significant breakthrough for Matías, she chose a "holistic" approach to independent film by working with other makers and in other areas of field. She worked as a sound recordist, associate producer and production assistant to survive and refine her skills. Continuing production, she co-directed *HOUSING COURT* (1984), a documentary that explored the complex and arcane machinations of the Bronx Housing Court, with Billy Sarokin on a New York State Council on the Arts grant and Sarokin's equipment. By teaming up with people who had access to equipment and common interests, she pragmatically solved her equipment problems. In addition to production work, she worked with Women Make Movies' *Punto De Vista Latina*, an exhibition presentation of Latin American women's films in Latino communities throughout New York, and co-edited a catalogue on Third World media. Seeking a more stable creative outlet, she secured

a job at WNET/Channel 13 on the *Metroline* series as an associate producer and worked her way up to producer. Beni is now the Senior Producer of the Independent Television Service (ITVS) based in Minneapolis and responsible for developing programming by independent producers for public television.

Pedro Rivera, a history student from San Juan, Puerto Rico, was referred by members of Sandino Films in Puerto Rico to Jaime Barrios, a Chilean filmmaker and co-founder of Young Filmmakers Foundation. With his interest in history, education and film, he began teaching filmmaking to Latino children at Young Filmmakers Foundation, now Film/Video Arts. There he met his long-time collaborator, Susan Zeig, and together with Jaime Barrios and the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños (Hunter College) embarked on the production of a historical compilation film about the impact of Operation Bootstrap industrialization program on Puerto Rico, *MANOS A LA OBRA*. Continuing his collaboration with the Centro and Zeig, he completed *PLENA IS WORK, PLENA IS SONG* (1989), a documentary about working class Puerto Rican culture expressed through the African-based music and singing of *plena*. Upon completion of that film, he taught in the public school system and is working on a series of videotapes about Puerto Rican community life in New York and a film on the economic status of Latinos, *The Economic Mambo: One Step Forward, One Step Back*.

In addition to these three financially-strapped documentarians, who made their mark on Puerto Rican film and video on the East Coast, there were a number of other makers on the scene dealing with issues of labor organizing, Latino music and the political status of the Island: *WHAT COULD YOU DO WITH A NICKEL* (1981), a documentary film about Black and Latino domestic workers forming a union in the South Bronx was co-produced by the author of this article; Carlos Ortiz completed *MACHITO: A LATIN JAZZ LEGACY* (1986), a documentary film about Frank "Machito" Grillo, the Cuban Latin jazz composer and bandleader; Zydna Nazario, an architect by profession, directed *THE BATTLE OF VIEQUES* (1986), a documentary about naval maneuvers on the island of Vieques off the coast of Puerto Rico and is currently fund raising for *LINKING ISLANDS*, a documentary film about the evolution and intersection of New York based Puerto Rican art and politics. Another of the few formally trained filmmakers of this era, Vicente Juarbe, directed *PUERTO RICO: OUR RIGHT TO DECIDE* (1984), a documentary film on the political status of Puerto Rico for the Methodist Church.

These documentarians were committed to illustrating the history, social issues and culture of Puerto Ricans so long ignored by the dominant culture. They attempted to represent the complex survival strategies developed by Puerto Ricans in the midst of abject racism and poverty. While some of these films suffered from low production values as people struggled with the language of the form, limited funding and lack of experience, they more than made up for their limitations by their passionate quest for validating and complex images and theft insider's knowledge of the culture.

Their overriding contribution was to defy conventional assumptions and assert that Puerto Ricans should occupy the center of cinematic discourse in order to reflect the variety of implicit and explicit responses to oppression. Some subjects internalized their oppression, others fought against it and yet others determined to survive, got around it. These multifaceted responses to oppression gave a name and

face to the invisible "other." The women in *IN THE HEART OF LOISAIDA*, poor and uneducated, found their "voice" as community heroes for thousands to see.

THE STORYTELLERS

While the documentary form had its advantages, it also had its limitations. Limited to material retrieved from the field — if subjects did not articulate an issue clearly, then makers were forced to rely on narration. Hence, most of the aforementioned films utilized narration to a greater or lesser degree. Eschewing the ebb and flow of the interview and talking heads format, a small group of makers chose the narrative form to visualize their stories about Puerto Rican experiences.

The films, for the most part, expressed the subtle and complex fabric of the internalization of racism. For example, **Pablo Figueroa** directed his first narrative piece for NBC in 1974 about the dilemma of a fifteen-year old girl who is compelled to take the reigns of the family. *WE, TOGETHER* presented the interweaving nature of one family, the centrality of family life in the Puerto Rican culture and the dissolution of this fictive family in the face of economic and psychological hardship. Deciding to work outside the television format with its inherent formulaic limitations, Figueroa embarked on independently making *CRISTINA PAGAN* (1976), a short narrative about a young mother who accepts the death of her child through spiritualism. Working with a core of Latino technicians at commercial equipment houses, he painstakingly made the film through free labor and personal finances.

Discovering film through theatre, his natural affinity for fiction was realized in the narrative form, where he could visualize the inner reality of oppression, while the documentarians had chosen to show its outer manifestations. Unable to secure the financial wherewithall to produce a feature film in the late 80s, he collaborated with the Committee on Hispanic Families and Children to direct *DOLORES* (1988), a short narrative, shot on film but edited on video due to economic reasons, about domestic violence within the Latino community.

While Figueroa felt alone in his solitary quest to fictionalize Puerto Rican realities, **Luis Soto** — formerly with Sandino Films in Puerto Rico and *OYE WILLE*, another Puerto Rican series produced by Lou De Lemos for PBS — was collaborating with Angela Fontañez, who started out with WNET's *Black Journal* in 1968. They made *REFLECTIONS OF OUR PAST* (1979), a short drama that featured young people traveling back in time to discover their history and culture. Originally part of a series of television programs for young children on Puerto Rican history and culture, only one video was produced.

Yet, Soto persevered to establish his own production company making and became the first Puerto Rican to direct a film for the PBS dramatic series, *American Playhouse*. His *THE HOUSE OF RAMON IGLESIAS* (1982) is a feature length film adapted from a play about an educated Puerto Rican man who reconciles his love/hate relationship with his janitor father. The film handled the self-hatred faced by many people of color head on while not sacrificing the dynamic bonds of love within the family. In 1987, Maria Norman directed *THE SUN AND THE MOON*, a narrative feature film about a Puerto Rican woman's personal odyssey into her identity.

SEARCHING FOR A MODE

The most prolific maker to emerge during the late 70s was **Edin Velez**. Influenced by Marshall McLuhan while studying fine arts at the University of Puerto Rico, he journeyed to New York to study video at Global Village. He became involved with the early downtown video scene of the Vasulkas in Soho. Escaping the burgeoning commercial video industry to teach at Young Filmmakers Foundation, he began working on his independent work in earnest.

While his early work was characterized by experimentation, *TULE: THE KUNA INDIANS* (1978), a representational documentary about the Kuna Indians of the San Blas Islands off Panama, was the first work to receive critical acclaim. His later work, *META MAYAN II* (1981), was a visceral and evocative personal essay of his trip to Guatemala. Not wanting to become "pidgeon holed as the Puerto Rican making Latino tapes,"[4] he solicited and received funding from the New York State Council on the Arts to make *THE OBLIQUE STRATEGIST TOO* (1984) about the composer Brian Eno and *AS IS* (1984), a meditation on New York. In 1984, Edin, his wife and partner Ethel, and the author of this paper produced *SANCTUS*, the first video installation by a Puerto Rican artist at El Museo del Barrio. While living in Japan on a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, he directed *THE MEANING OF THE INTERVAL* (1987), a personal essay on Japanese culture, and the arresting *DANCE OF DARKNESS* (1989) about Buto performance. In an effort to define himself artistically and create his own cinematic language, Edin has explored other cultures and experimented with time, location and collaging within video art. He is currently working on a videotape about Puerto Rico, the birthplace he fled in the late 60s. It is likely that the tape will represent a synthesis of his high aesthetic sensibility and all the ambivalence of a Puerto Rican living in self-imposed exile. He is also the recipient of an ITVS grant for a project on the Conquest and Columbus.

A GROUNDING IN SELF

Missing from the outlining of Puerto Rican filmmakers are several important non-Puerto Rican contributors. Cuban born and Puerto Rican raised filmmaker **Ana María García** made the seminal *LA OPERACIÓN* (1982), about the massive sterilization abuse of Puerto Rican women, and is currently editing *COCOLOS Y ROQUEROS*, a documentary about how race and class are played out through culture in Puerto Rico. **Diego Echevarría**, a Chilean born and Puerto Rican raised filmmaker who worked at WNET and NBC for many years, directed two independently produced documentaries: *PUERTO RICO: A COLONY THE AMERICAN WAY* (1981), a short film about the political status of Puerto Rico, and *LOS SURES* (1984), a beautifully crafted film about Williamsburg, a Puerto Rican community in Brooklyn, New York. *LOS SURES* premiered at the New York Film Festival but was not well received by many members of the Puerto Rican community because of its focus on marginalized members of the community and omission of stable working class families from Williamsburg.

Alfonso Beatto, a Brazilian cinematographer based in New York during the late 70s and early 80s, established the Latin Film Project as a support system for Latin American filmmakers. During that time, he directed *PARADISE INVADED*, an early documentary film about the colonialization of Puerto Rico, in collaboration with **José García** and other Puerto Rican filmmakers. *LOS DOS MUNDOS DE*

ANGELITITA (1978), a feature-length film about the dissolution of a Puerto Rican family after its arrival in New York, was directed by **Jayne Morrison**, a white woman from New York, and written by a Puerto Rican. It featured an all Puerto Rican cast and many Puerto Rican/Latino crew members.

National and cultural affirmation occupied the center of these cinematic propositions as film and video makers struggled to represent and legitimize the history, conditions and cultural development of their communities in the United States.

While the advent of small format video technology increased the possibilities of representation, only a handful of emerging Puerto Rican makers have emerged on the scene. **Frances Negrón**, an Island-trained anthropologist and graduate film student, collaborated with community activist **Alba Martínez** to create AIDS IN THE BARRIO (1988), a documentary film about AIDS in the Puerto Rican community. She is currently working on BRINCANDO EL CHARCO, a documentary film about the development of the many Puerto Rican communities in the United States. Cuban **Eta Troyano** recently received an ITVS grant for her film on Puerto Rican rap performers in the South Bronx. Entertainment lawyer and member of the Young Lords Party quoted in an earlier section of this paper, **Iris Morales** is collaborating with **Pablo Figueroa** on an examination of the legacy of the Young Lords, a militant political organization created during the political heyday of the 60s.

A few makers have opted to work in other areas of the independent media field. **Yvette Nieves-Cruz**, a cinema studies graduate of New York University, who directed *L.E.A.R.*, a videotape on the anti-imperialist artists league in Mexico, no longer makes media but is instead a major exhibitor of Latino film/video at the CineFestival of San Antonio, Texas. Because of the tenuous nature of the field, many have deserted it for more secure careers.

Puerto Rican cinema has grown from its infancy to toddlerhood with little guidance and parental direction. It has emerged and developed in spite of the structural obstacles inherent in denying "voice" within this society. As more makers gain experience and mastery over the forms of their choosing, they will use the medium with more precision, sophistication, flair and experimentation. There is still a striking need for Puerto Rican and Latino makers to produce and direct films and videotapes about a multiplicity of issues and concerns. Some of these concerns are directly linked to the status and conditions of the Puerto Rican and Latino communities in the United States. Yet it would be a grave loss if the makers limit themselves or are limited by cultural institutions and its gatekeepers to just those themes. As we live in a complex and changing world, our special place within the margins allows us to interpret U.S. culture and society in a unique way. We can contribute to the contemporary cultural discourse by producing filmic texts that present the complexity, innovative and myriad experiences of our survival in an often hostile terrain.

Our contributions can be to deconstruct and reconstruct the assumptions of this society by presenting other perspectives that are more dialectical in embracing the contradictory nature of life and its dynamic movement. By presenting another sense of space, rhythm, time and seeing that is multidimensional, pollinated by a melange of rich cultures and traditions that are ever changing. To continue our

process of growth as mediamakers and as members of various communities, we require not only more production and access to resources, but more Puerto Ricans actively involved in the critique and study of formal issues of film and video.

The films and videotapes discussed in this article grounded a generation of Puerto Ricans who had been nurtured with the dual and contradictory impulses of a colonized people with a passion to resist. We were "never meant to survive" as Audre Lord says in her poetry and yet we survived, fought back and created. These films and videotapes are our testament to survival. They forced us to look at ourselves, to step outside of our condition and objectify our reality, to deconstruct and then visually re-construct it with a new vision and power extracted from that painful process. They allowed us to reflect on ourselves — the films were our passageway — moving from objects to subjects. As makers, we were tormented by lack of opportunity, experience and resources. As spectators, we liked what we saw; sometimes we didn't. Many times we disagreed with the interpretation, but we could never deny that we were engaged in a life-death dialogue about our existence.

NOTES

1. *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega*, edited by Cesar Andreu Iglesias (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), p. xii.
2. An earlier version of this article appeared in *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Bulletin* 2.8 (Spring 1990): 22-43.
3. *EL PUEBLO SE LEVANTA*, 16mm documentary film distributed by Third World Newsreel.
4. Interview with Edin Velez.

Puerto Rican women directors Of lonesome stars and broken hearts

by Frances Negrón-Muntaner

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 67-78

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ON THE USES OF HISTORY

The writing of this paper confronted me, for the second time in these last few months[1],[\[open notes in new window\]](#) with the exasperating reality of the lack of critical scholarship on important areas of Puerto Rican politics and cultural production. One of the most devastating effects of this situation is that "we" (meaning anyone concerned with Puerto Rican history and culture) continue to lack a space for debate and, hence, growth. Although this is not the appropriate space for an apology on the uses of history (mythic and strategic) and multi-voiced debates, I would like to suggest that critics and historians of Puerto Rican cinema must begin (and continue) to approach film and video not only from the point of view of the maker (interviews, for example) or the inherent "quality" of a production (whether the film is "good" or "bad") but also in a more comprehensive way that promotes the discussion of particular textual strategies in specific political, historical and cultural contexts.

Given the monumental task at hand for anyone wishing to write about Puerto Rican cinema[2], and the need for major research, I have decided to concentrate on a set of specific questions, mainly: What strategies (thematic and textual) have Puerto Rican women used in constructing their films and videos? Are there any significant points of divergence and/or convergence in the work of Puerto Rican women film/videomakers? And, if they exist, how can these similarities and differences be accounted for?

Finally, and perhaps more important for this paper: how can we read films and videos produced by Puerto Rican women to enhance and multiply spaces of debate concerning crucial political and cultural questions for Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the United States? Thus, this essay attempts to map several tendencies of this production and some of the strategies used in particular films and videos. I have decided to concentrate on independent production, although it becomes increasingly urgent to approach the works of women in television networks both in Puerto Rico and the United States. Within this independent production, I have selected works which let me problematize dominant ideology and constructions of Puerto Rican history and identity as well as the relationship between anti-colonial and gender politics.

LESS THAN A QUINCEAÑERA?

Cleo de Verberena's *O MISTERIO DE DOMINIO NEGRO* (1930) is generally credited with being the first major film produced by a woman in Latin America[3]. While a number of women in the region managed to produce some works during the century (particularly in countries where national film industries exist such as Mexico and Brazil), it is not until the 1970s that women in Latin America and Latina women in the United States begin to produce works on a regular basis. The reasons often cited for this minor explosion (we still need more) relates to at least three factors: the rise of feminism as an international movement and an empowering discourse, the institutionalization of film education through universities and colleges and the entry of women into the journalistic/ broadcast professions[4]. In the case of the United States, the Civil Rights Movement and the articulation of different versions of radical politics among "women of color" also contributed to Latina involvement in the media[5].

In Rosa Linda Fregoso's recent article on Chicana cinema[6], she mentions that 1990 marked the quinceañera or fifteenth year of Chicana filmmaking in the United States. Given the important points of contact of Chicano and Puerto Rican film history (in terms of political ideology and aesthetics), it is not surprising that one of the first important films made by a Puerto Rican woman in the United States (Beni Matías' *THE HEART OF LOISAIDA* in collaboration with Marci Reaven) was produced during the same decade that Chicanas began producing their first films. It was also (although a product of different circumstances) during the late 1970s that in Puerto Rico, Poli Marichal began producing experimental animations in Super 8 film.

I have selected these two filmmakers as a starting point for the discussion of Puerto Rican women's filmmaking even though journalist Maggie Babb's *LAGUNA SOLTERA*[7] is perhaps the first film made in Puerto Rico by a woman, because their work signals the emergence of two consistent traditions in Puerto Rican women's cinema: the politically committed documentary and the experimental short. Despite the fact that Puerto Rico's film history has been greatly fragmented and interrupted, the so called "golden age" of Puerto Rican cinema associated with the *División de Educación de la Comunidad*[8]. This organization trained a whole generation of Puerto Rican filmmakers but did not train a single woman and had no Puerto Rican woman in major creative positions. Thus, the *División* produced a handful of films (from over a hundred) on women's rights, without the full participation of women as directors, writers, editors or producers.

POLITICAL ALLEGORY AND WOMEN AS METAPHOR: ANTI-IMPERIALIST MASTER NARRATIVES VS. THE SELF-EMPOWERMENT TRADITION

It has been suggested that, in general, Latina and Puerto Rican women filmmaking has concentrated on documentary production because of its low cost, accessibility and efficacy as well as its perceived superiority in representing the "reality" of women's lives[9]. On this last issue, Liz Kotz comments:

"But there is another kind of appeal that documentary media may have for women film/videomakers in Latin America — the attraction of those people who are ignored or underrepresented in the dominant media to

forms that document their own reality, culture and perceptions." (p. 61)

However, in this investigation, I have found that experimental narrative shorts are as prevalent as the documentaries. Some of the same considerations of accessibility and low cost may explain this second choice, although I would suggest that part of the reason for the emphasis on experimental formats is the fact that a number of Puerto Rican women filmmakers (particularly from the Island context) have come to film or video through a prior engagement in other fine art forms such as photography (Frieda Medín) or other visual arts (Poli Marichal and Mari Mater O'Neill). This specific element of the maker's formation (along with issues of education and class) accounts for a widespread practice of "film/video art," on the margins of the commercial media world in Puerto Rico.

Given the extent of the film/video art practice, however, what is perhaps in need of further research is the question of why the documentaries are the most *successful* productions among feminist critics in the United States and the most politicized sectors in Puerto Rico and the United States. One possible line of inquiry includes the general understanding among hegemonic intellectuals (artists and critics) of the "non-political" consequences of "form" versus the transparency of the "content."

Beni Matías, a New York born Puerto Rican filmmaker, collaborated with Marci Reaven in the production of *THE HEART OF LOISAIDA* in 1979. This film, as a significant number of the early Chicano and Puerto Rican films, is strategically constructed to foreground and celebrate the self empowerment activity of a group of people, specifically, working class Puerto Ricans in New York City. The textual strategies used in this type of film/video narrative include the following: the positioning of "ourselves" (Chicanos or Puerto Ricans) as central and capable agents of change; the identifying of the obstacles to empowerment not within ourselves, but in the dominant structures which reproduce the conditions of poverty, sexism, economic oppression (ignoring homophobia, however); and the "showing" of images of self empowerment as examples to the community and as celebration of collective achievement. As activist and journalist Blanca Vázquez comments:

"We became active in the 1960s and 70s in order to mobilize and organize. Media coverage of struggles and takeovers was an essential strategy of the Puerto Rican civil rights movement, a lesson not lost on the government or the press, who have moved in the 1980s and 90s to minimize the coverage of social movement and to deny access to an activist press." [10]

Thus, the ultimate objective of making these films was mimetic. They sought the identification of the viewer with the central "voices" and their mobilization (similar to the "protagonists") into action. Akin to "taking over" your community, your block or your house, was also taking over the means of representation. Cinematic representation became a form of literally "projecting" collective struggles.

THE HEART OF LOISAIDA tells various "success stories" of Puerto Rican residents and housing organizers in improving housing conditions in a section of the Lower East Side. Yet this struggle (for improved housing) is never "only" that, but a metaphor for community and collective struggles. The opening voice over

(unlike the "Voice of God" in LA OPERACIÓN and LA BATALLA) does not resurface as a structuring strategy throughout the film and has primarily the function of "introducing" the viewer to the community s/he is about to *hear* (in the metaphoric sense of alternative "voice"). The voiceover also re-affirms, by enunciation (language), the community's symbolic empowerment measured by its capacity to name and transform:

"This is a community that has given a new name to its community, this is Loisaída. But Loisaída is a community that is also struggling to survive. People are organizing their buildings, asking on many levels how can we make this ours."

The narrator's location as part of the "we" marks a very significant difference to the anti-imperialist narratives whose voice-over narration is designed not to "orient" but to instruct and provide a reading of the "evidence." In this sense, the "individuals" in THE HEART OF LOISAÍDA are never "individuals" but rather *members* of a community. Thus, they stand (synecdotically) as the will of the collectivity (since the "collectivity" as such is not representable). It is not surprising that two of the most significant strategies of this narrative voice are the frequent group interview and the insistent use of the pronoun "we" which embodies both the ideology of the film and its participants.

THE HEART OF LOISAÍDA, as with the earlier THE DEVIL IS A CONDITION (1972), is a story of empowerment (not an "objective" account of housing organizing) which seeks to convey the fundamental idea that "we" (poor, urban, New York Puerto Ricans) can have control over our own lives. Even the "landlord," which would be essential in a dichotomous narrative of conflict through the ever ominous and omnipresent "they," is almost completely absent in the narrative. And, when this center shifts, towards the end of the film, to the professional community organizer, the film loses strength since it partially moves from the tenant's first person accounts of the process to the organizer's discourse of management. However, even the organizers are part of the "we" discourse. As a young organizer declares: "We are doing something for our community."

A second significant quality of THE HEART OF LOISAÍDA (and my own 1989 film, AIDS IN THE BARRIO, is the lack of major historical contextualization. This contrasts sharply with the Puerto Rico-focused works which participate in a form of "compulsion to history" where all contemporary problems are rooted in specific aspects of colonial history. The U.S.-focused documentary films made by women (and men), by necessity or by choice, tend to concentrate on specific issues, relevant to large sections of the "community"[11] and directly seek to modify the viewer's behavior. These choices may be related to the assumption of the "community" in the United States as mainly defined by class and/ or "race." Hence, the need to address issues requiring immediate transformation such as housing or health.

Issues related to poverty and "identity," — while present in many of the works by Puerto Rican women focused on the Island — are consistently linked to colonialism and macro-histories. The Island-focused narratives tend towards a "sadist" impulse: to tell stories of something that is being done to "us." The U.S. narratives, on the other hand, focus on stories about "the need of we" doing something for "us." In THE HEART OF LOISAÍDA, the most prominent gesture which ideologically locates the film within the broader nationalistic current is the use of

the song, "Cuando tenga la tierra," which "stretches" the notion of "land" in an equivalency between "house" and "motherland" and (in the process) acknowledges the colonial status of the Island.

Another significant strategy used in *THE HEART OF LOISAIDA* is the frequent portrayal of women as actors and inclusion of their voices. In this sense, although a "feminist" direct statement is not made, the "we" of this film clearly includes women. This contrasts markedly with, for example, Zydna Nazario's *LA BATALLA DE VIEQUES* (1986), where not a single woman is interviewed. This focus on women may (or not) be partly explained by the maker's own feminist (or womanist) politics. However, and as we discuss *LA OPERACIÓN*, *BURUNDANGA* and *LA BATALLA DE VIEQUES*, it is important to note that in *THE HEART OF LOISAIDA* and other U.S.-focused films, the presence of women is asserted less for its allegorical possibilities and more for its empowerment potential for the viewer. In this sense, even when the films are not exclusively focused on women's struggles or experiences directly related to women, they are much more *about* representing women's empowerment (taking over their lives), often occupying previously all male arenas of culture and politics than feminist-Marxist analysis of State power.

LA OPERACIÓN (1982) made by Cuban-Puerto Rican Ana María García is probably the first high impact film made by a woman born and/or raised in Puerto Rico. It is also the first and still one of the few documentary films to focus on an issue which affects mainly women. The film uses voice-over narration, interviews and archival footage to tell the story of the political practice of massive sterilization in Puerto Rico. *LA OPERACIÓN* is a highly provocative and problematic film in various ways, some of which I will attempt to discuss.

The principal question which *LA OPERACIÓN* raises (within the context of this paper) relates to the possibility of a feminist voice within the anti-imperialist narratives which have preoccupied Puerto Rican documentary filmmaking for decades. Thus, while the film is focused on a policy which affects women as women (and very specifically, women's reproductive choices), the film is not about women as gendered subjects in a patriarchy but instead uses the stories of women to reveal and critique U.S. colonialism on the Island.

There are at least two strategies used in the film to bring about this effect. The film does not, despite some of the assessments made about it, talk either about women's resistance to the policy of massive sterilization or the reasons why women were chosen as the target of the policy. To engage in this analysis would force the film text to confront issues that specifically address women as subordinated subjects in a patriarchal culture (gender and family power relations), something the text resists. Thus, instead of devoting some time to (and, as in all other sections, editorializing upon) the family context (which is greatly, if not exclusively responsible for the success of the policy), the film text is centered on the ideological underpinnings of the sterilization policy and the State which puts it in place.

To the film's credit however (and this is one of the reasons why it is such a rich text), there are a number of moments where a certain "excess" makes manifest the need for a gender-specific reading. For example, in one scene a woman who was sterilized comments that her husband preferred her to be sterilized rather than him because of his fear of losing his sexual potency:

"Me puse de acuerdo con mi marido y me operé. Me dijeron que yo le dijera a mi esposo que se operara él porque la operación para él no era cuestión de un ratito y a él no le iba a afectar en nada, pero él que no porque mucha gente decía que el hombre cuando se opera pierde energía, verdad, y la energía no tengo que explicarla porque ustedes saben más o menos que es. El no quiso y yo dije pues entonces me arriesgo yo."

"My husband and I agreed that I would have the operation. They told me to tell my husband to get operated because his operation was a matter of minutes and it wasn't going to affect him in any way. But he didn't want to because people used to say that when a man is operated he can lose his energy. And I don't have to explain what energy means because you know more or less know what it means. He didn't want to have the operation so I said, well, I'll take the risk." (My translation)

In another instance, a black woman comments:

"A veces me siento triste, tu sabes, porque Carlos cuando deso dice que hace falta una nena aquí. Me gustaría adoptar una nena para mi esposo pero tiene que ser una nena bien especial, prietita igual que yo...igual. Que se parezca mucho a mí como la quiere él, porque él no la quiere blanca...como el no, prietecita igual que yo y mi mismita carita."

"Sometimes I feel sad, you know, because Carlos sometimes says that we need a little girl here. I would like to adopt a little girl for my husband. But it has to be a very special girl, black like me. One who looks a lot like me, like he wants it, because he doesn't want her white like him. He wants her black, just like me and with my same face."

And the last image, wonderfully contradictory, shows a young pregnant woman walking with a tee-shirt which reads: "Made in Puerto Rico." This last image, assuming we believe that women are more than victims, begs the question: why do most Puerto Ricans (men and women) — despite colonialism, forced sterilization and poverty — favor a close association with the United States?

Two other problematic instances of the film suggest the ways in which Puerto Rican women's film practice is deeply rooted in a master narrative of anti-imperialism and impedes it from a gender specific analysis. One of the most emotionally charged images of the film is a woman being taken to the operating room. Under this sequence, a well known Puerto Rican singer, El Topo, laments in counterpoint to the scene, the plight of women who are sterilized. The song is an ode to women's reproductive virtues and the horror of not bringing forth life:

"Sé que a los veinte años fue perdida
la esperanza de dar un fruto Nuevo
y al volver a mirar en el espejo
me vi en tierra estéril convertida."

"I know that at twenty you lost
the hope of giving new seed
and when I looked at myself in the mirror

I saw myself turn into sterile land."

The dominant association between women as metaphor for the motherland is also prevalent in this song and in the use of the song with the images described above. Finally, the cut which leads us from this image (the women giving birth) to that of U.S. troops in the late 19th century, seals the possibilities for the questioning of *Puerto Rican men's* constructions of motherhood and seeks to explain the particular oppression of women (and the sterilization practice) today by a *single* cause: the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico. The final result of the combination of these strategies is that women (as metaphor for the true Puerto Rico) are victims of colonialism, the surfaces on which both U.S. and right-wing Puerto Rican forces encode their victories.

Thus, LA OPERACIÓN is ultimately a film about the ideological underpinnings of a government policy. It impressively traces the various sources of this practice and some of the agents which made it operant. In the process, however, it doesn't examine the ideological content of important premises relevant to the practice. Thus, for example, it effectively argues that the idea of the two-child family is an ideological proposition promoted by the government to control the working class' reproductive behavior. On the other hand, the film leaves intact the (also ideological) notion that women *should* have a great number of children. Thus, one of the two main structuring voices in the film, Frank Bonilla, accurately summarizes what the film's main (despite its shifts) ideological position is:

"The real problem is how the conditions of life can continue to worsen for most Puerto Ricans even as the island's human energies produce massive profits and wealth for U.S. corporations."

LA OPERACIÓN remains one of the most important films made in Puerto Rico and as an important text for the exploring of the relationships between feminist and materialist discourses, still to be taken up.

In LA BATALLA DE VIEQUES (1986), some of the strategies used in both THE HEART OF LOISAIDA and LA OPERACIÓN are present. LA BATALLA critically explores the consequences of increased militarization on the small island of Vieques, off the east coast of Puerto Rico. The film points to three of the major players in the process: the U.S. military establishment, its allied interests within the Puerto Rican dominant power structures, and a group of anti-militaristic *viequenses*. The film constructs a "we/they" dichotomy (as in LA OPERACIÓN) and uses it to defend a space as "home" (as in THE HEART OF LOISAIDA). For example, a spokesperson for an activist group declares at the beginning of the film articulates one of the main voices of the film (the "we"):

"Yo estoy hablando a nombre de un grupo de viequenses que sentimos la responsabilidad, es hacer de Vieques *nuestra* casa, porque de *nuestra* casa ya nos sacaron." (My emphasis).

"I am talking on behalf of a group of viequenses who feel the responsibility of making of Vieques our house, a house we have been thrown out already."

Despite the potential of LA BATALLA to be structured as an empowerment

narrative, its extensive authoritarian use of voice over and the positioning of the first person narrative within the structuring voice over, instead produces a "victim" narrative. Specifically, this is often strategically translated into the embedding of a statement made by the narrator ("Many were deceived by false promises made by the military") followed by an interview which corroborates the point. Thus the subjects are treated as guarantees of the "theory" or political analysis unilaterally proposed by the film. This narrator, unlike the one in *THE HEART OF LOISAIDA* (but similar to the one in *LA OPERACION*), is not a "viequense": "Viequenses compare themselves to the brown pelican, an endangered species that lives on the island." The narrator's primary objective is the creation of trust in the viewer so we "agree" with the interpretation presented to us by the weight of the "evidence," often presented with maps, statistics and archival footage. The voice over, which is the only female voice, digests all the information, suppressing ambiguity to the highest degree possible:

"Lacking educational and job opportunities [school age youths], they are drawn to the claimed goals: the pursuit of leadership and strength to be brought to bear in a competitive and aggressive world."

The "we/they" dichotomy, because it does not build on the "we" but rather on fixed oppositions, results in an oversimplification of the political forces at play in the process. Thus, the emphasis of the film is the "exposing" of the military's callousness rather than the complex "internal" issues which greatly contribute to this state of affairs. One crucial issue not addressed in the film concerns the reasons why, despite the obvious military abuse in Vieques, there is not a more widespread movement in Vieques and on Puerto Rico to expel the military. The reasons for this are not only related to the political economy (which the film addresses) but popular feelings about the United States. The avoidance of these much more thorny issues results in the creation of victims' narratives where Puerto Rican history is inscribed as a David and Goliath myth so that the master narrative of anti-imperialism obscures other relevant aspects.

To still assume that the majority of Puerto Ricans reject the U.S. presence ("deep, deep down") is to participate in the same fundamental political mistake that the left has incurred in Puerto Rico for the last twenty years. In this sense, the film goes so far as to misrepresent the political reality of Puerto Rico:

"The accord [between the Puerto Rican government and the military], acclaimed as historic, in fact has only one historic quality: it sets out to reaffirm a colonial relationship which the Puerto Rican people are increasingly moving to change."

LA BATALLA DE VIEQUES significantly struggles against an abusive military and capitalist establishment by different social sectors of Vieques. But it is also, and equally significant, about how Puerto Ricans and Viequenses address these circumstances. And the only granting of difference (assimilationist government officials versus the people) is not enough to account for the widespread Puerto Rican apathy to the Vieques struggle. Finally, as mentioned earlier, it is very significant that a film which attempts to represent how a whole society is affected by the military presence, does not include a single woman's voice.

THE POLITICS OF FORM: EXPERIMENTAL NARRATIVES AND ANIMATION

Experimental film/video which has seen perhaps the most consistent production, in many respects initiated Island Puerto Rican women's filmmaking. Contrary to U.S. Puerto Rican production, where the political documentary has dominated, the experimental short has produced some of the best pieces of women's filmmaking. In this section, I would like to refer to the work of pioneer Poli Marichal and young visual film/video makers Mari Mater O'Neill and Mayra Ortiz.

Poli Marichal is considered by many women filmmakers working today as simply the "pioneer." She started working in the late 70s in Super 8 film and with such collectives as the Taller de Cine de la Red. In some of her most successful works, there is a mix of genres and forms, and a complete faith in the power of experimentation. Many of her works are meant to be seen in sequence, since they act as expansions of one of Marichal's central thematic concerns: Puerto Rico. Although ideologically similar to *LA OPERACIÓN* and *LA BATALLA DE VIEQUES*, Marichal's work takes on the form of an existential anger and despair, a pain so deep it can only surface in flashes of color and texture.

In general, Marichal uses color to signify psychological and social realities and language. The use of language is particularly significant since it is through language that power relationships and collective survival strategies are articulated. The constant switch between English and Spanish (and sometimes French) addresses the split consciousness of the Puerto Rican subject.

Central themes include the following: environmental destruction, the need to "snap out" of the consumerism and materialism of Puerto Rican society, and the need to create alternatives which will ensure our survival. While the social and political "ills" of Puerto Rico are (mechanically) rooted in U.S. colonialism, Marichal does not construct Puerto Ricans as victims. In order to explore some of these issues, I will concentrate on Marichal's last piece, *DILEMMA I: BURUNDANGA BORICUA* (1990), which in turn is one of several earlier pieces which explore the "Island dilemma"

The use of color (particularly blue and red) to represent the specificity of the landscape of an island and its oppressive connotations was first used in *UNDERWATER BLUE* (1981), an animated/live action meditation on the island space. Here, the ocean is a self-enclosed, entrapped space which can be metaphorically read as the space of the maker of the piece as a Puerto Rican subject. The multiple shades of blue suggest levels of submersion in an exasperating reality where the supposed actors cannot transform it. The use of the star as the fundamental symbol of empowerment and freedom is inaugurated in this piece where it is linked, however, to the ocean: it is a sea star.

In *BLUES TROPICAL* (1983), a visceral animated piece, the use of language is more overtly political, and the imagery is more conventional. Thus, for example, words painted on film read: "Ay bendito, Puerto Rico, USA" and the "USA" letters are transformed (animated) into the figure of a shark. The role of the star as symbol becomes more central in this piece, although it is still an image which has not reached its full potential as a symbol of liberation: it is in limbo, it is only attempting to survive. Thus, the common "refranes" used in *BLUES TROPICAL* are of a great despair: "Sálvese el que pueda" and "A mal tiempo, buena cara." Towards the end of the work, a glimmer of resigned hope is summarized in the following

phrase:

"Nos come la miseria pero tenemos nuestra estrella."

Marichal's latest piece, *DILEMMA I: BURUNDANGA BORICUA*, starts with the painted on image of a live action character, significantly, a black woman dancing *plena*. This technique of painting on film or interrupting the live action flow by animation or insertion of text is one of the most important strategies of Marichal's work. The image is never just an image (it is not self sufficient to construct meaning) but a surface to begin addressing the fundamental issues: language, politics and representation. In general, *BURUNDANGA* is a tragicomic parody of the Operation Bootstrap initiative, pointing to its failure and degeneration into environmental destruction and materialism. It is also a call for re-enchantment, a desperate hailing to the audience to overcome apathy and re-posses what is "ours."

The humor of this film, originally part of a multimedia installation, is one of its most innovative strategies. Within the landscape of oppression, Marichal manages to force us to see certain petrified symbols and images differently, something which the documentaries, often with the same ideological underpinnings, fail to do. Thus, in *BURUNDANGA*, the painted Puerto Rican flag (in between the U.S. and Spanish ones) becomes animated and after the eagle and lion fight it out, the lone "star" wakes up and runs from the enclosed blue space of the triangle.

A second instance is the transformation of the calf in the Puerto Rican national "escudo" into an animated goat, loafing, drinking beer and smoking cigarettes on the beach, framed by new slogans, for example "936" and "food stamps." Despite the simplification of the meaning of a socially conquered right such as food stamps, the freshness of the treatment marks an important departure from the authoritarian historical narratives of the political documentary tradition.

The use of popular sayings and the poetic use of language, handwritten on film, functions as the "collective consciousness" of the film, providing political analysis, personal associations, and hope. The deconstruction of dominant ideological discourses are frequent in this text. Thus, images of tropical beauty are glossed in "Isla tropical," while a garbage dump with stray dogs is framed as "isla mendiga." The play on language also produces political insight and a comment on language which makes this work painfully self conscious: from "Welcome to the Shining Star," we are only a step away from "Welcome to the Shining Scar..."; "Island" becomes "Ay, land" in a constant meditation on the ways that language constructs our realities. And in the various images of an abandoned movie theater's coming attraction boards, we see that the old "Imperial" theater is playing (what else), *THE CURSE*.

Marichal's call for re-enchantment is crucial in assessing the important question, asked by many of these films, of "what is to be done" concerning the Puerto Rican colonial question. For Marichal, the present materialist culture is drowning all imagination, creativity and sensibility. Thus, Marichal locates the "imaginative" and creative in the two most discursively marginalized elements of Puerto Rican culture: the Taíno Indians and the Africans; and the essence of the Puerto Rican in a third group: the *jíbaros*. The text suggests that "Once upon a time, a bit of the past in myth..." In animated form, the Taíno myth of the origin of the Island is represented, with its magical and mythic elements. This is promptly destroyed by a

sailing Spanish ship which transforms itself into various shapes until it becomes a set of cannon balls in the Morro fortress.

The second, and most prominent sector invoked is the Puerto Rican of African descent. The presence of black Puerto Ricans, men and women as well as children, is not a form of tokenism but a symbol of resistance. Thus, the guardian of the star and the symbol of a better order of things to come is a black woman. The recurrent images of boys at play and searching, as well as the omnipresence of black musical forms based on the drum and *pleneras*, also reinforce the centrality allocated to black cultural forms in Puerto Rican culture. However, the "soul" of the culture, in a very contradictory move, is the white, mountain-dwelling *jíbaro* who is "an endangered species." In this instance, Marichal is claiming another pervasive myth, which constructs the Puerto Rican countryside and peasantry as a sort of paradise where pollution and exploitation did (does) not exist. Thus, the last voiceover (a male voice) in some ways reverses the ambiguity of the work:

"En cada puertorriqueño, late un corazón de jíbaro y late un corazón de patriota. Aunque parezca on cosa, en cada puertorriqueño late un corazón de jíbaro, late un corazón de patriota. Es más, yo diría, que Borinquen entero es un jíbaro.

"In every Puerto Rican a *jíbaro* and a patriot's heart beat. Even when it looks like something else, in every Puerto Rican a heart of a *jíbaro* and a patriot beats. What's more, I would say that Borinquen as a whole is a *jíbaro*."

Finally, there is one last strategy in this piece which is characteristic of a number of makers who come from visual arts backgrounds or are engaged in the visual arts community (Medín or Fritz): the construction of art as a privileged space for transformation. It is perhaps this assumption which makes Marichal's work boldly experimental and politically ambiguous. On the one hand, BURUNIDANGA doesn't give us an authoritarian narrative about capitalism and colonialism, although there is a clear critique, ideologically consistent with most of the other works discussed here. On the other, it proposes independence as the "cure" of all economic, political and social ills of Puerto Rico although the major liberation practice is art.

O'Neill's FLAMENCO (1991) is an exploration of Puerto Rico's colonial history (Spanish and U.S.) through different representational strategies. In the opening sequences, flags framed by monitors are literally "flying" on the screen. Similar to Marichal's work, language is a tool for comment, irony and parody. The U.S. and Spanish flags function as symbols of oppression while the Puerto Rican one stands for liberation. The initial commentary of the piece suggests the eternal condition of colonization of the "New World," making use of irony:

"En el 1492, Colón descubrió a America. En 1992 se filmó una película al respecto. Los indios hablaban inglés."

"In 1492 Columbus discovered America. In 1992 a film was shot about the subject The Indians spoke English."

Part of the soundtrack contains a chorus of hysteric voices suggesting that "Puerto

Ricans have more fun than blondes." The use of floating monitors with images of flags and other icons, foregrounds the self-awareness of this piece as construction. This is further reinforced by the framed color bars.

The second sequence of the piece is an elliptical narrative about the routine existence of a middle-class Puerto Rican woman (a "blonde"). The protagonist is bored with local television and decides to play a video showing two flamenco dancers. As she gets dressed to go out in her "American car" (which is why she, as metaphor for all Puerto Ricans, "wants to live in America" as the parodic soundtrack suggests), a flamenco woman dancer appears in her life. The "apparition" resurfaces while the woman is in the daily traffic jam, by gliding off her car. As in AURELLA, there are multiple voices articulating the narrative and soundtrack, reinforcing the ambiguity of the relationship between the two women and their respective societies.

While the piece constructs Puerto Rican everyday life as insane and makes colonialism at least partly responsible, it also shows an ambivalent (complicit?) relationship between the white Puerto Rican woman and her Spanish past. Thus, while the woman curses the flamenca's presence in the traffic jam, she is also jealous of her as she finds her combing her daughter's hair and finds her seductive enough to want to actually "be" her. The last image represents the woman dressed in the flamenca's clothes, in what can be read as both the seduction of the Puerto Rican by the Spanish or the ambivalent, yet ridiculous attempt of Puerto Ricans to remain being "Spanish," with all its connotations of racial "purity" and "civilization." The flamenca is, ultimately, more centered than the Puerto Rican woman. Thus when the latter asks her when will she go home and the flamenca's voice answers: "You are home."

Finally I would like to briefly comment on Mayra Ortiz's GROUNDSWELL (ca. 1988), a meditation on the relation between politics and art on a global scale. The video is constructed around a montage of a young painter (white, male) who is working on a wall with the live figures of a man (of African descent) and a woman (of Asian descent), and appropriated imagery from the news representing global political resistance. Rap and reggae — African Diaspora music once more — keep the rhythms of the montage. Unlike the other works discussed, this piece does not address in any way political issues related to Puerto Rico or Latinos. It does, however, make a claim to the power of African Diasporic cultural resistance in the form of music. An ambiguous piece, one of the possible readings relates to the activist role of the artist in "breaking the walls" and liberating not only the political structures which oppress us but our own bodies from the constraints of reactionary politics and representation.

One of the obstacles in a purely "liberationist" reading, however, is the fact that the artist (as privileged consciousness) is male and white; while the bodies which are acted upon by his hand are black and Asian. This can be read as a comment on Western representation strategies regarding non-white peoples, but, I would argue, that the video's structure does not favor this reading since the "lone" artist is primarily "inspired" by the politics and not necessarily engaged in it (as a body), nor is there a questioning of his artistic production. The power of art to break down the walls of the non-communication of the world as television spectacle is another central deconstructive effect of GROUNDSWELL. Thus the struggles of South

Koreans, Chileans and Germans are brought together "by the hand" of the filmmaker.

CLAUSTROPHOBIC NARRATIVES

The few narrative films made by Puerto Rican women allow us only to make some anticipatory comments on those aspects that these narratives share and where they diverge. I will consider here the following works: *LOS ANGELES SE HAN FATIGADO* (Teresa Previdi, 1987), *ALBA* (Mayra Ortiz, 1989) and *AURELIA* (Frieda Medín, 1988-90).

In general, these films are women-centered narratives where either one or multiple voices are articulated through the "consciousness" of a woman (or girl in the case of *ALBA*). The stories are told in a non-linear way, allowing the contradictions of consciousness to determine the structure of the narrative or making use of the surreal to destabilize the "normality" of the story. The three films also take place within a single space or within constrained spaces, where women's mobility and freedom are minimal. Finally, at least two of them are based on literary texts.

Inspired by Luis Rafael Sánchez's play of the same name, *LOS ANGELES SE HAN FATIGADO* is the story of the daughter of formerly wealthy landowners. Angela becomes a prostitute in the city and, ultimately, goes mad. The film is structured on the reminiscences of the protagonist, as she wakes up and is mortified by her immediate surroundings. The reminiscences of Angela are nonlinear and oscillate between her past and her present situation with frequent "hallucinations" (early on in the narrative, she believes she has a baby). Thus, the film constructs a portrait of a "split" subjectivity. The adaptation does not follow Sánchez' text as a whole, and takes some freedoms with creating a surreal environment where music and moving objects are part of a "reality" which the viewer is forced to share.

LOS ANGELES SE HAN FATIGADO constructs a portrait of a victimized woman in the melodramatic tradition of the "fallen woman." Angela comments to herself:

"Si mi hermana Encarnación llega a ver donde he caído"
(If my sister Encarnación could only see how low I have fallen).

In this sense, it is not a portrait of empowerment since the central character is a victim of the dominant constructions of femininity and womanhood, the capriciousness of men, and dominant institutions such as the insane asylums. Her own uncritical comments concerning her class origins and sexism make her an unsympathetic character and a trapped woman. The space which she occupies is dark and bare, and even when windows or doors are present, she cannot escape. In fact, her single most liberating gesture, murdering her pimp, only leads her to another enclosed space: the asylum, where she will be taken "care" of by other men, this time dressed in white.

Despite the fact that this piece is not overtly political, there is a possible reading which points once more to the use of women's experience as metaphor for society's oppressions. Angela's body becomes the surface of class and gender oppression. In this sense, the question of whether the woman is actually speaking becomes an important one, as with *LA OPERACIÓN*. Finally, despite the fact that Angela "hears" voices, we experience her voice as whole in the sense that it is not

interrupted by other voices in the narrative. Thus, Angela's impossibility to speak can be read not as an incapacity on her part but as a sexist culture's refusal to listen.

Similar to LOS ANGELES SE HAN FATIGADO, ALBA is inspired by a literary text, Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*. A family dinner is experienced through the eyes of the main character, a little girl called Alba who inherits the magical qualities of her dead grandmother and thus inhabits "another" world, that of the (good) spirits. Unlike AURELIA and LOS ANGELES SE HAN FATAIGADO, the world of Alba is a *positive* woman-centered world where only marginal men seem to be of any interest (since they are feminized by their interest in magic or "telling stories"). The most significant and enduring relationship is among women: between Alba and her grandmother. The men take on different positions around this relationship: the grandfather embodies Lacan's law of the father, identifying the family oppression of patriarchy with the broader political one (he is politically on the right wing), Uncle Marcos inhabits the world of imagination and alchemy, and is a teller of stories[11] and Uncle Nicolás is a loser, interested in santería, but without the necessary aptitude.

Alba's world is a world of spirituality and the security of the grandmother/daughter continuum[12]. However, assumptions about class privilege are untouched and the absence of the mother is not addressed in the narrative. We see the world through a young girl's eyes, but these eyes are those of a well-to-do, privileged girl who will "inherit" everything (including the woman who works as a maid). Alba's voice is in dialogue with her surroundings, but it is not interrupted by them; her consciousness is "whole." Finally, the space of the narrative, a single dining room, and the painting from which the grandmother metaphorically originates, contribute to the self-enclosed environment, again a comment on women's subjectivity and the privileging of the "internal" against the oppressiveness of the external, frequently embodied by male figures. The danger of this is, of course, the potential to read women as self-contained, "spiritual" creatures without any engagement in the world or in politics. However, it is significant to mention that Ortiz' work questions conventions of "realism" and integrates elements of the surreal and the fantastic within an intellectual and artistic "high brow" context which has actively resisted them. In this sense, the enclosure of the space is partly opened up by the magical.

Frieda Medín's AURELIA is an experimental narrative centered in the internal, multi-voiced and conflicting dialogues of the protagonist's "consciousness." From the opening of the rum, there is a sense of self-reflexivity as the "Aurelia" unfolds the titles printed in paper and located in an abandoned lot. As soon as the scene shifts to an enclosed space, the positive black and white image alternates with the negative of the image suggesting an "altered" state. In this sense, representation becomes distorted and a "mirror" of Aurelia's consciousness.

The use of negative images is one of various strategies used to construct a "split" subjectivity. Screeching and water sounds and frequent unconventional cutting (jump cuts) also contribute to the sense of "unconscious" space. The voices which form the fragmented soundtrack suggest that Aurelia is faced with social pressures and prejudices for being what she is: a woman artist and mother. Thus, a number of the voice fragments are distinct "Ella ss artista," "Yo brego allá afuera, tú

quédate aquí adentro," and, "Donde están los nenes?"

As with both ALBA and LOS ANGELES SE HAN FATAIGADO, multiple symbols populate the character's environment, with ambiguous significations. In AURELIA, however, the concern for "voice" is taken further since Aurelia's consciousness is not her "own" but a confrontation of her own and others. Interestingly, the inability to cope with these contradictions leads her to escape even more within herself and the world of "disposable" objects critiqued at the beginning of the film by an anonymous voice. The various readings allowed by the text don't exclude the construction of the protagonist as mad and isolated. But it seems to favor a reading of Aurelia as the misunderstood woman artist whose source of creativity lies within herself (in this sense art is once more privileged as a source of liberation). Thus, when Aurelia rejects the mirror as distorting, she walks out the door into an open space and a voice is heard: "Pues, si fueras mediocre." As she leaves the room, a set of clocks set at different times all go off suggesting the impossibility of objectivity, even when measured by "instruments."

AURELIA functions as a reflection upon the split subject, torn by U.S. consumer culture, Catholic and ancient spirituality, gender conventions, and a corrosive social environment. However, unlike ALBA, spirituality is not Aurelia's refuge from her alienation as she is trapped by deforming conventions about the feminine. Aurelia's only refuge is herself, but remaking her image as a clown, as spectacle. Freeing herself from the "exterior" into "art."

GETTING TO FEEL AT HOME: THE WORKS OF SONIA FRITZ

Mexican filmmaker Sonia Fritz has been living in Puerto Rico over five years and has been steadily producing documentaries. Her first Puerto Rican production was MYRNA BAEZ: LOS ESPEJOS DEL SILENCIO (1989), a documentary portrait of Puerto Rican visual artist Myrna Baez, followed by VISA PARA IN SUEÑO (VISA FOR A DREAM, 1990), a documentary about the economic and social context of Dominican women's emigration to Puerto Rico. Her latest piece, PUERTO RICO: ARTE E IDENTIDAD (1991), returns to the preoccupation of the first work, that of the interconnections between art, landscape, politics and identity.

In general, the work of Sonia Fritz tends to be well crafted, and usually seeks internal consistency (portraits; linear histories). Thus, in LOS ESPEJOS DEL SILENCIO, the voice of the artist is uncontested and unquestioned. She is allowed to tell her own story and the filmmaker acts as "midwife" to the story, helping in the telling. In common with the narratives and most of the work produced by women in Puerto Rico, the central character is a woman for whom politics and art merge, although politics is understood in the sense of macro-politics (e.g., the independence struggle). The politics of gender and sexuality are systematically suppressed in this film although Baez' own work is saturated with it.

In VISA FOR A DREAM, a potentially explosive issue — that of Dominican immigrants to Puerto Rico — is conmined by the portraits of several women and their process of "adaptation" to Puerto Rican society. By emphasizing the "positive" aspects of the women's experiences and avoiding the hostility of the new context, Fritz constructs a picture of success similar to the empowerment narrative of THE HEART OF LOISAIDA, although "individual" personal stories are more prominent. This strategy allows Fritz to produce an alternative discourse to counter anti-

Dominican hysteria in Puerto Rico by providing "positive" images of Dominican women, their hopes and lives. Finally, I would like to briefly concentrate on PUERTO RICO: ARTE E IDENTIDAD, since this film expands the so called "educational" documentary form at the same time that it raises important questions regarding dominant assumptions about Puerto Rican art, identity and politics within the art establishment in Puerto Rico. The importance of addressing this last issue is essential, as many of the Island Puerto Rican women artists and film/videomakers have been either formed or actively participate in this community.

PUERTO RICO: ARTE E IDENTIDAD uses a series of strategies to formally convey one of its central premises: that Puerto Rican art is Puerto Rican because it is rooted in a particular landscape and politics which embodies the Puerto Rican "soul" ("alma"). Thus, the barriers between art and "reality" are constantly blurred: a shot of a tree becomes a painting of the tree, the copula of a church re-emerges in another image. The film uses interviews, voice over and docudrama conventions to carry the burden of (effectively) synthesizing over a 100 years of history. Unlike most "history of art" films, PUERTO RICO: ARTE E IDENTIDAD not only "tells" a story but makes a number of choices, inclusions and omissions which make it a crucial text for debating the relationship between art, politics and identity in Puerto Rico. In general, this film is part of a more general and influential discourse on identity, which desperately needs to be examined.

The film, despite its attempts of inclusion, is a teleological narrative: it seeks to demonstrate that what is essentially Puerto Rican is "captured" in its art and that it is irremediably (no matter what genre or format) an embodiment of our "values" (which are never really addressed or questioned). The closest any of the narrators gets to proposing a Puerto Rican value is the (supposedly) safe landscape: it is a Puerto Rican value to place a "piña" rather than an apple at the edge of a portrait. A particularly clear moment in the difficulty of maintaining this analysis is when Oller's well known painting, *El Velorio*, is interpreted. If we were to accept the premise that all Puerto Rican art re-affirms "our values," how can we read Oller's critique (racism?) of the African Diaspora tradition of the "baquiné? Whose values are being addressed?

The concept of "to puertorriqueño" takes over all other relevant categories of analysis such as class, race and sexual orientation. It only concedes a space for gender, but with a highly problematic interpretation of the importance of gender politics. Thus, some of the most questionable statements are precisely articulated by women (narrators) around the issue of gender. For example, "feminism" is defined as "a quest for the personal" and as "revealing new aspects of identity." Does this last suggestion mean that gender is a *new aspect* of Puerto Rican identity? Another instance of the difficulty of the inclusion of the "other(s)" in this narrative is the selection of Juan Sánchez as the token U.S. Puerto Rican artist. The condescension to Sanchez is disturbing. Contrary to the "Islanders" or those U.S.-born artists who have returned to the Island, it is "natural" that Sánchez paints as "he does" because:

"Cada cual busca su identidad a su modo. Los artistas que se han ido del país a los Estados Unidos la buscan, como era de esperarse, desde sus propias perspectivas personales de discrimin, marginación social, de

opresión."

"Everyone looks for his identity as they see fit. The artists who have left the country for the United States look for it, as we should expect, from their own personal perspectives of discrimination, social marginalization and oppression."

Aside from the fact that discrimination, social marginality and oppression are not "personal" perspectives but collective experiences, the comment underscores the possible reading that Sánchez' work is, in many ways, closer to the historical narrative presented in the film than works included as "soulfully" Puerto Rican (from the Island). The ideological connections are obscured by the notion of "identity."

The premise that Puerto Rican art "reflects" history and that by looking at "our" art we can understand our history, shows very little understanding of the distribution, exhibition and regulation of art production. It also leaves completely unexamined the consistent political tendencies of many artists (a sociology of artists may be appropriate here), at the same time that it ignores the ambiguities, contradictions and tensions in all works of art. If Puerto Rican art "reflects" Puerto Rican history and struggles, why aren't there posters commemorating fifteen years of gay and lesbian struggles in Puerto Rico? If Puerto Rican art reflects "our cultural values," why isn't there a series of murals glorifying what many Puerto Ricans consider "Puerto Rican": virginity, sexism, racial prejudice, homophobia, pro-U.S. sentiment? PUERTO RICO: ARTE E IDENTIDAD provides us with a powerful articulation of one of the most important discourses in Puerto Rican culture, albeit one still in need of critical examination.

AFTERTHOUGHT: WHAT'S LEFT TO BE DONE

As I finish writing, I realize how incomplete and tentative these observations are, and how only when more women begin to write, can these propositions and assumptions become really meaningful. I have suggested there are various trends in Puerto Rican women film/video production when examined as a "body" of works.

First, in the U.S.-focused work, there's a tendency to treat issues of immediate concern and to adopt textual strategies towards the transformation of behavior and self-empowerment. Second, the Island-focused production reveals a "compulsion to history," a need to investigate the colonial "origins" of particular issues. Third, a woman-centered narrative and experimental production has various emphases on voice and on representing women's "unconscious" processes and subjectivities. Further, the investigation into these tendencies requires a longterm research effort on various relevant aspects such as the following: the sociology of the makers, the relationship between the works and audiences (including critics), funding structures and a more detailed examination concerning references, strategies and intertextuality. This work is yet to be done.

NOTES

1. The first instance was when I accepted to write an article on the history of Puerto Rican gay/lesbian history and politics. I found "yards" of documentation and not

an "inch" of reflection.

2. Kino García's book on Puerto Rican cinema, *Breve Historia del Cine Puertorriqueño* (San Juan: Taller de Cine La Red, 1984) is a useful starting point but not a work of criticism or interpretive history.

3. Catherine Benamou, "Filmmaking in Latin America," *Point of View: Latina, A Study Guide for the Women Make Movies*, Punto de Vista Latina Film Collection, no date, 7-8.

4. Liz Kotz, "Unofficial Stories: Documentaries by Latinas and Latin American Women," *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Bulletin* 2.8 Spring 1990: 58-69.

5. Lillian Jiménez, "From the Margin to the Center: Puerto Rican Cinema in the United States," *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Bulletin* 2.8 Spring 1990: 28.43.

6. Rosa Linda Fregoso. "La Quinceañera of Chicana Counter Aesthetics," *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Bulletin* 2.8 Spring 1990: 87-91. A longer version is published in Chon A. Noriega, ed., *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

7. García, *Breve Historia del Cine Puertorriqueño*.

8. The División de Educación a la Comunidad was a government-sponsored initiative to use art (visual, photography, film) in educating and promoting change in the Puerto Rican countryside. Over 100 films were made from the 1940s to the 1950s and a whole generation of Puerto Rican filmmakers were trained in the workshops of DIVEDCO.

9. Jiménez (1990); Kotz (1990).

10. Blanca Vázquez, "Puerto Ricans and the Media: A Personal Statement," *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Bulletin* 2.8 Spring 1990:4-15 (p. 6).

11. I have addressed the difficulties of using the notion of Puerto Rican "community" in several articles, including: "Shifting Communities/Forming Alliances" (with Kelly Anderson, Alex Juhasz, Indu Krishnan), *Felix* 1.2 (Spring 1992): 66-72; and "The Ethics of Community Media," *The Independent* (May 1991): 20-22.

12. This also constitutes an important trend in literary works by Latin American, Afro-American and African Diaspora women's writings.

OTHER FILMS AND VIDEOS BY PUERTO RICAN WOMEN

Díaz, Lily, AFTERIMAGES: AN EXERCISE ON VIDEOPOETRY (1986)

Jimenez, Lillian (and others), WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH A NICKEL (1981)

Lemus, Cecilia, ELIZAM (1990); CON SU MISMO CORAZÓN (1991)

Maria Norman, THE SUN AND THE MOON (1987)

Marichal, Poli, AL ROJO VIVO (1982); VUELO DE ANGELES (1982); COFFEE BREAK (1982); UNDER-WATER BLUES (1982); BLUM (1983); GUERNICA (1983); DE TAL PALO. TAL ASTILLA (1984); ISLA POSTAL (1984); LUNA (1985); PAISAJE (1985); UNA HISTORIA DE LOS REYES MAGOS (1987); LOS ESPEJISMOS DE MANDRAGORA LUNA (1987); MICRO-TRIP (1988)

Matías, Beni, THROUGH YOUNG PEOPLE'S EYES (1981); HOUSING COURT (1984)

Negrón, Frances Mutaner, PIECES OF LIFE (1990)

O'Neill, Mari Mater, M (METROPOLIS) (1988)

Soto, Ivonne María, REFLEJO DE UN DESEO (1985)

Yvette Nieves Cruz, L.E.A.R.: LEAGUE OF REVOLUTIONARY WRITERS AND ARTISTS (1987)

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Latino Collaborative

by the Latino Collaborative

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, p. 79

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The Latino Collaborative is a film and video membership organization, established to support and promote the development, funding, production, and distribution of films and videos made by and about Latinos in the United States. Based in New York, the Collaborative has a growing membership of over 200 nationwide.

The organization was formed in the summer of 1987 after a group of New York-based independent filmmakers met and discussed the need to break the vacuum within which many Latino artists worked. As a result of many meetings and surveys, a series of short and long term goals were developed. The areas of most concern to the members still are funding and the need to provide more visibility for the diversity of Latino films and videos.

One of the Collaborative's achievements has been to identify a network of Latino independents and to create channels for the open flow of information both among its members and with other groups. To this end the organization publishes a bi-monthly newsletter and maintains a members' skill bank. It also has held workshops and seminars on fundraising, grant writing, scriptwriting, directing, and distribution.

The Latino Collaborative is very active in trying to get the work of Latinos distributed and exhibited. As part of that objective, it publishes a Title Directory and holds regular membership screenings. Last year the Collaborative initiated a special bi-monthly screening series in collaboration with Downtown Community Television Center. This series highlight recently produced works of Latinos in a diverse range of subjects and styles. The screenings provide the New York public with a most needed outlet to see works by Latinos. This year, beginning in April, the series will be presented at the Joseph Papp Public Theater.

There is a growing and culturally diverse Latino population in the United States. While media attention on Latino issues has increased in recent years due to the sociopolitical climate, the level of Latino participation in forming these images still needs work. Faced with the usual problems of independent film and video productions, Latino film and videomakers must also deal with the tremendous need for Latinos to establish their own voice within and outside of the community. The Collaborative attempts to address this issue.

Very often Latinos are "rediscovered" by the general public when major film

productions like THE MAMBO KINGS are released. These films introduce some elements of Latino cultures to a wide audience, and the producers are to be commended. There are some disturbing elements, however, in terms of their production. For example, THE MAMBO KINGS, a big-budgeted Hollywood movie, retraces the story of two Cuban brothers who come to New York to make it big. While the film is visually beautiful and the music riveting, there is something disturbing about it. Could it be that of the four lead actors, only one is Latino? Could it also be that in a \$30 million movie there is not one Latino in the film crew? Of course, producers are quick to point out that there are Latinos in the supporting cast (Celia Cruz and Tito Puente, both musicians) and that the screenwriter, Cynthia Cidre, is Cuban. This is all very true, but it does not change the fact that capable Latino producers and technicians are not regularly hired for Hollywood films, even in those few instances that the production deals with a "Latino" subject. So it is up to Latino film and videomakers, and organizations like the Latino Collaborative, to make the film industry aware of this discontent and, more importantly, of the fact that Latino producers and directors are here and are here to stay. As these struggles unfold, the Latino Collaborative will continue to support Latino filmmakers in their efforts to produce independent, alternative media, and to seek wider distribution and exhibition for their work.

For more information on the Latino Collaborative and its services, write or call our offices at: 280 Broadway, Suite 412. New York, NY 10007. 212-732-1121.

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Cine Acción, the Bay Area Center for Latino Film and Video

by Cine Acción

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, p. 80

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1992 turned out to be a big year of transition for Cine Acción.[1] After twelve years as the Bay Area's center for Latino/Latin American Cinema, the group felt it was time to step back and reassess its role in the media field, both nationally and locally. Two new staff members, a new board of directors, and a group of some seventy emerging local and national makers in the membership have rejuvenated Cine Acción for the 1990s.

Cine Acción was founded on the principle that Latin American cinema must be promoted in the United States and that Latinos in the U.S. must be actively encouraged to produce media. One notion underlying this principle is that Latin America can be better understood through cinematic presentations in this country and similarly Latinos here could utilize media for the greater understanding and advancement of our communities. Cine Acción feels that this principle is as true today as it was in 1980 when the group was founded. In the six Bay Area counties alone the Latino population has reached 817,000. Yet these numbers are not reflected in the professional media industry, where there are still only a handful of Latinos whose work is distributed on a national level. Nor are there many more who are actively competing for public broadcasting production monies. As Cine Acción sought to define its role in the 1990s these realities remained in our minds. Latino independent producers need an organized center to disseminate information, maintain networks with regional and national media institutions, and directly support the production and exhibition of work by and about Latinos. Cine Acción will continue to serve this role in the 1990s.

The newly constituted Cine Acción crew has agreed that our programs and activities will first address the needs of independent local artists. From this commitment spawned our twice-monthly film series, Cineteca. Since Summer of 1991, the Cineteca program has screened feature films considered classics of Latin American cinema alongside works by Cine Acción members or other independent Latino producers in the U.S. Often these independent works enhance the themes of the features with images of the Latino experience in the San Francisco Bay Area. Most importantly, works by local artists, members and friends of Cine Acción are seen, engaged and encouraged on a regular basis. This twice-monthly program reflects a shift away from programming festivals and large events — such as our

"Women of the Americas Film & Video Festival" in 1988 — in favor of consistent and stable exhibition of Latino/Latin American film and video for the local community. The Cineteca will continue in 1993. We encourage Latino producers to submit works for possible screening in our program.

Finally, Cine Acción will continue to make its presence known on a national level. We have decided to enhance our role as a clearinghouse for information regarding independent Latino film and video throughout the country. There are many potential outlets (beyond broadcast) for works by and about Latinos that must be tapped: schools, universities, festivals, and social service agencies. For example, Cine Acción used Latino media in order to assist one social service agency in its prenatal care for Spanish-speaking women. As an institution that has been accessible to regional and national exhibitors for consultation about available titles, Cine Acción has served local and non-local producers.

Many arts organizations, including Cine Acción, have felt the financial pinch as the economy worsened throughout the 1980s. Despite these setbacks, we also know that the appreciation of contemporary Latino/Latin American media is growing — as is the awareness of the need for more Latino producers, writers, and directors. While we aren't in a position to directly fund production projects we remain committed to our founding principle: To promote the production, distribution, and understanding of contemporary Latino/ Latin American film and video. Not only does Cine Acción plan to survive the tough times ahead, we aim to grow and strengthen our ability to serve Latino media artists in the future.

Cine Acción publishes a quarterly newsletter that includes interviews, reviews, and information on exhibition, events, and funding sources. We will also publish *Cine Works*, a catalogue of members' work in 1993.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this statement appeared in *Cine Acción News* 9.1 (March 1992): 1, 8.

For more information regarding Cine Acción programs and services, please contact either Gina Hernandez, Administrative Manager, or Jennifer Maytorena Taylor, Program Director, at Cine Acción, 346 9th Street, 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103. Phone: 415-553-8135.

Break of Dawn A Latino/a politics of language

by Christine List

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 81-86

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BREAK OF DAWN (1988) is an independently financed low budget film distributed by Director Isaac Artenstein and Producer Jude Pauline Eberhard through their company CineWest Productions. The film is an expanded narrative version of Artenstein's biographical documentary BALLAD OF AN UNSUNG HERO (1983) about Pedro J. González, a Mexican immigrant, who hosted and produced one of the first major Spanish-language radio programs in the United States. The film's director, also born in Mexico, grew up in Southern California and went on to complete a degree in filmmaking at UCLA. He was one of the original members of the Border Arts Workshop where he collaborated with Guillermo Gómez-Peña to produce BORDER BRUJO (1990), a video recording of Gómez-Peña's performance piece on linguistic identity and cross-cultural perception. BREAK OF DAWN, Artenstein's first feature, echoes the Border Arts Workshop's preoccupation with the importance of language as a marker of cultural identity and site of resistance. Through Artenstein's use of historical narrative, issues of linguistic self-determination become enmeshed with other political questions deriving from the era in which the movie is set and which still have relevance to the Latino community today.

The film opens on a shot of San Quentin prison. The colors in the shot are muted, slightly sepia, suggestive of an historical drama. Titles come up, indicating it is 1938. There is a cut to the interior of the prison. A Mexican man is standing before an Anglo prison warden. The abrasive warden interrogates the prisoner, demanding to know why he wrote letters in "Mexican" for other inmates. After withstanding the many insults from the warden, the prisoner finally becomes enraged and knocks the warden to the ground with one forceful punch. Guards rush in to restrain the prisoner and carry him off to solitary. During a long tracking shot in which the prisoner is lead to his cell, additional titles announce that this is the true story of Pedro González, who grew up in Mexico, served as General Villa's personal telegraph operator and who later immigrated to the U.S. in 1928.

This initial sequence establishes the director's cinematic strategy. He aligns the audience's point of view with that of González. The viewer interprets González' violent response to the warden as justifiable, and is gratified at his decision to endure solitary confinement in order to retain his dignity and his freedom of

speech. Such positioning of the audience on the side of the underdog is typical of many contemporary social justice films. However, the protagonist in many Hollywood social justice films is often someone who is unenlightened, who does not acquire social consciousness until after suffering an injustice himself (or herself) or witnessing a series of injustices suffered by his or her oppressed ethnic friends (e.g. SALVADOR, CRY FREEDOM).[1][\[open notes in new window\]](#) In BREAK OF DAWN we have immediate identification with a Mexican immigrant who is already acting according to a conscious identity politics. Thus the audience is invested in this man's story from the outset and interprets the subsequent series of flashbacks from a position of commitment rather than naiveté and skepticism as is typical of other social justice films.

Using a basic flashback story structure, setting up the first scene with an act of heroism, and aligning truth with the Spanish speaker are all ways the director carefully conveys the ethnic experience to an uninformed audience. But the effectiveness of this approach has come under fire from Mexican film critic Jorge Ayala Blanco who argues that such tight control of the audience's perspective is not necessary, especially for a Latino audience. Ayala Blanco believes that Artenstein's lack of subtlety alienates some viewers who resent his formalistic didacticism.[2] Yet one could make a strong argument to the contrary. The film's opening scene manages to avoid these problems of cinematic pedagogy by making identification a pleasurable experience for the viewer. The viewer gets the satisfaction of temporarily subverting the evil warden through the opening fight scene where González' first act of rebellion against the warden is to answer him in Spanish. His words are translated for the viewer, but not for the warden so that the viewer (whether Spanish-speaking or not) is in on the insult and can identify with the act of self-assertion. Knowledge of the translation indicates a privilege leading to new relations of power in the scene, both physical and linguistic.

The use of Spanish becomes a theme in the film as the story develops through flashback. Pedro González and his wife, Maria, cross the border, where they are waved through at a check point by immigration men. This scene clashes with expectations for a stereotypical Hollywood image of border immigration, replete with narrow escapes and life threatening chases. Pedro and Maria are welcomed by U.S. authorities, not hunted down at gunpoint. In a subsequent scene during their journey north, they stop alongside the road. Next to them is a poor white family tending to their overheated car. In Spanish, Maria offers them water. As the whites rudely refuse her kindness, the audience perceives that it is ignorance of the Spanish language on the part of these whites which fuels some of their hatred for the Mexicans. Later, Pedro and Maria arrive at the home of their cousin's family in East Los Angeles. The conversations between them are bilingual. Each of the characters switches back and forth, at points stumbling to translate, but patiently succeeding in communicating. In one scene where Maria and Matilde (Pedro's cousin's wife) are hanging laundry in the back yard, they discuss their husbands with each other. As they compare opinions about theft spouses, their similar experiences as women and as wives helps them to transcend the linguistic limitations. A common horizon of experience based on gender as Mexican and Mexican American women becomes the basis of cultural/ linguistic interaction.

This emphasis on language is further developed in a pivotal scene in BREAK OF DAWN when Pedro listens to the radio and discovers that there is no Spanish radio

programming in Los Angeles. After trimming his mustache to appear more "in style" (North American), he goes to the local station and asks to host a radio show. He is quickly turned away by the white station manager and told there is no market for such programming. The film then flashes forward to San Quentin. González is naked, in solitary, drinking water out of the toilet. The juxtaposition between the radio station scene and the prison cell foreshadows that González will have to pay a heavy price for bringing Spanish radio to the community.

The following scenes show that González does eventually get his own show on KMPC. It is an early morning music program called "Los Madrugadores" (The Early Riser's Show) which he hosts and performs in. The show is an immediate success, and Pedro goes on to become an immensely popular Spanish-speaking radio celebrity, reaching listeners all over the Southwest. González' ability to garner a vast Mexican American audience is soon recognized for its political potential. He is approached by an ambitious Mexican American police Captain named Rodríguez who asks Pedro to help with the reelection of the white District Attorney. For doing so, González is rewarded with a letter granting him permanent asylum as a political exile.

Later, a prominent Mexican American businessman, Senor Rosales, also requests a favor of González — to promote his stepdaughter for Queen of the Fiestas Pátrias (the Mexican ethnic festival) — in exchange for continued advertising revenues. González is then courted by a third member of the Mexican middle class, the Mexican Consul, Señor Dávila, who wants to use his radio program to lend support to unionizing Mexican immigrant workers in the United States. González agrees, despite threats from the District Attorney and Captain Rodríguez. Eventually, because of his pro-union stance, the District Attorney sets González up on a rape charge, offering him probation if he confesses to the rape he did not commit. González refuses to capitulate and is sent to San Quentin.

THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

In her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa tells of how she and other Chicanos/as were forced to take speech classes in college in order to "get rid of our accents." [3] In the same essay, she quotes Ray Gwynn Smith on language rights: "Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?" (p. 53). To many Chicanos/as who came of age during the Chicano Movement, speaking Spanish was a political act, and, to some, it even became an indicator of being Chicano/a. [4] Decades later, the use of Spanish in Chicano art and culture continues to signify a symbolic quest for Mexican cultural roots which have been threatened by the many years of racist U.S. policies and various other assimilationist factors put in place since the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. [5]

Today, Spanish language and accent still serve as markers of cultural difference in the United States. Outside the Chicano/a community these traits identify Chicanos/as and Mexicans as Others. Within the community, Spanish language and accent indicate the degree of similarity and/or acculturation between Chicanos/as and Mexicans. Beyond this, speaking Spanish is emblematic of other more extended cultural ties and kinships, representing the bonds with Latin America and the Caribbean, legitimizing a Third World political consciousness on the part of Chicanos/as. Evidence of this expansion of ethnic identity to new

transnational boundaries can be seen in the increased use of inclusive identifying terms such as Hispanic and Latino/a among Chicanos/as.

According to political scientist Felix Padilla, Chicanos/as expand their identity and position themselves as Latino/a when merited by the political demands of a particular situation. He also observes that the Latino/a identity label can only be successfully deployed as a mobilizing agent if it appeals to common sentiments or emotional ties within the groups. To guarantee its effectiveness as a means of producing solidarity, Padilla asserts the Spanish language must become a site of collective struggle within the community.[6]

BREAK OF DAWN appeals to this notion of collective struggle by tying Spanish language rights to a concrete situation of cultural/linguistic-based oppression and by insinuating this situation into contemporary experience. Artenstein shows that the peculiar Mexican-ness of González' identity is sometimes subsumed within his broader identity as a Spanish speaker. Therefore, the film not only articulates the Mexican American identity issues relevant to the 1940s, but also is suggestive of a potential "Latino/a" identity that has become a platform in the 1980s and 1990s by transforming Spanish-language expression into an alternative, competing public discursive space for a diverse spectrum of Spanish speakers.[7] In this way, BREAK OF DAWN very cleverly situates an internationalist, anti-imperialist agenda *within* the borders of the United States.[8]

The present day English-only movement can be seen, in part, as a reaction against the collective expression of these political/cultural connections and further read as another aggressive attempt on the part of the some Americans to eradicate all sense of distinct national culture and pride among Chicanos and Latinos.[9]

BREAK OF DAWN was produced in the late 1980s, concurrent with the major campaigns for English-only regulations and the passage of the Simpson-Rodino Immigration Act.[10] As such, the film can be seen as timely commentary, having great significance as an interpreter of current anti-Mexican/anti-Spanish sentiment in the U.S. Teresa Montano and Dennis Vigil have argued that the English-only movement is a right wing attempt to systematically deny millions of Spanish speakers the right to bilingual ballots and bilingual education. They assert that this legislation, coupled with other factors of racism, would further diminish the already unequal political and economic status of Latinos in the United States. The state governments are, in essence, being asked not only to stop funding Spanish-language programs, but to also wipe out the cultural ties between Mexican/Latino populations which help to build solidarity and challenge the current systems of control.

Informed by this historical framework of language oppression and the English-only Movement, the narrative turning point in BREAK OF DAWN, the silencing of González and his radio program, represents the symbolic act of silencing an entire Latino/a culture. Stamping out the radio station also signifies the muffling of not only a linguistic group but also an "immigrant" group that suffers a class-based oppression as well. The narrative in BREAK OF DAWN skillfully develops a discourse on the connection between language, immigration and the working class oppression through several scenes showing the prevailing racist attitudes towards Mexican immigration and Spanish language use.

The second scene in the film, for instance, introduces us to the L.A. District

Attorney who uses immigration as a firebrand for his reelection while campaigning before a hall of American war veterans. The strained rhetorical style of the District Attorney's speech ("They have taken all your food") and the mechanized nods of approval on the part of the veterans shown as reaction shots work as shorthand for "fascist gathering." While the film is a little heavy handed in its use of the D.A. as a villain who has only one motivation (to further his political career), it still manages to articulate a fairly complex analysis of the problems of immigration and self-determination proposed by González' story. This is done, for example, in the scene in which a barrio store is raided. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) deports González' cousin and other customers to Mexico. In the next scene, the viewer learns that Pedro's cousin is in fact a U.S. citizen and sees the stress the arrest places on his family. Thus, the viewer is led to read the deportation incident as indicative of a racist immigration system which targets anyone who merely "looks Mexican." Foreignness is revealed to be a category based on appearances. The D.A.'s deportation rhetoric of the earlier campaign scene is even more suspect when it is considered in tandem with this later deportation scene.

The INS raid sequence also contrasts well with the scene in which Pedro and his wife freely cross the border. As we witness the violent ejection of previously welcomed guests, we begin to see the hypocrisy in the U.S. immigration policies. [11] Later on, the use of the immigration theme comes out again when González is rewarded with a letter of political refugee status for using his radio show to bring out the Mexican vote. The incident is played in a somber, ironic tone, for, earlier in the film, González proudly spoke about riding with Villa in the Mexican Revolution. To accept status as a political exile from Mexico, the country which he fought for, is a serious compromise for González, but one the audience reads as tragically necessary for González who must face the rampant deportations exacted upon his own community.[12]

The reference to the Mexican Revolution of 1910 in the film merits further discussion, especially insofar as the revolution was of serious concern to politicians and big business interests in the United States. A number of Mexican radicals and liberals such as Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón, Antonio Villarreal and Juan Sarabia fled to Texas and other cities in the United States to escape persecution from the Díaz government. During their exile in the U.S., these Mexican revolutionaries published radical newspapers and began organizing Mexican and Mexican American workers into labor unions, encouraging the union leaders to move toward greater political activism.[13] It is also said that other radical influences from Mexico during this period included a plan to liberate Mexican and African American peoples in the United States by creating a separate nation for them within North America.[14] The U.S. government was fearful that these immigrants would ignite a working class revolt that would spread throughout the United States. Therefore U.S. officials aggressively pursued these dissidents. In the end, several Mexican radicals (such as the Magón brothers) were captured as the U.S. Cavalry and the Texas Rangers joined forces with the Mexican government to purge the border.

After the revolution triumphed in Mexico, land reform was implemented and several foreign controlled industries were nationalized.[15] American business interests and the U.S. Ambassador were upset with the anti-imperialist policies of the newly formed Mexican government. There is substantial evidence that these

business interests conspired with Mexican opposition forces to assassinate President Madero in 1913.[16] For many decades after the Mexican revolution the U.S. government continued to view their southern neighbor as a threat. This was the case during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) who was heading the Mexican government during the years when BREAK OF DAWN takes place. Cárdenas implemented many socialist economic reforms including the further expropriation and redistribution of lands to the poor and the nationalization of the oil industry.

For contemporary Chicanos/as, the Mexican Revolution is often regarded as inspirational, a source of anti-imperialist fervor and a link with a revolutionary tradition. Villa and Zapata have become mythologized folk heroes in Chicano culture.[17] The mention of Villa and the revolution in BREAK OF DAWN evokes all these historical connections. As such the reference might produce paranoia on the part of a reactionary viewer, or a sense of victory and empowerment on the part of an audience which is invested in the spirit of the Mexican Revolution. For a Mexican audience, however, a sense of irony might surface when confronted with the film's revolutionary references, since many contemporary Mexicans feel that the ideals of the revolution have been betrayed by a government which is quick to make deals with U.S. business interests that lead to economic exploitation of Mexican workers (e.g. the *maquiladora* zones along the U.S.-Mexican border).

In BREAK OF DAWN, the allusion to the Mexican Revolution occupies its most prominent place midway through the film when González, after witnessing an attack on a labor-organizing meeting by the D.A.'s thugs, denounces the government's actions and then sings a ballad on the air which is critical of the U.S. The scene is done totally in Spanish. It is filmed with many point of view shots from the perspectives of the Mexican Americans who listen in the studio. The song evokes recognition, understanding and a feeling of empowerment on their part. At this point in the film, one senses that the Mexican revolution has finally spilled over the border. Language (Spanish), immigration, and labor organizing all congeal around the perspective of Chicano justice.

The director's argument is further solidified as we learn that the suppression of the Spanish language is intended as a means of controlling the working class. This is brought out as the narrative shows that the threats against González come after he uses the station as a voice for the masses of Mexican workers. In one telling scene towards the end of the film, the prosecuting attorney goes to KMPC and asks Pedro's boss if he understands Spanish, warning him that González has been advocating communism behind his back. This scene furthers director Aronstein's position on language use and class rebellion by tying the suppression of Spanish language rights to red baiting.

Anzaldúa says, "Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out" (p. 54). BREAK OF DAWN articulates this position with its ending. After González is imprisoned, his wife (with the help of the Mexican consulate) rallies the Mexican American community to secure his eventual release. In a scene before he walks free, González is shown in his cell playing his guitar and singing a Mexican ballad, an eerie lover's lament. González is shot from outside the cell. The bars, in soft focus, intrude on our view of him; a rather literal metaphor for a voice which cannot be silenced even under official state repression. Later, in the final shot of

the film, González is released from San Quentin. Several years have passed. Standing at the gate, he looks up at the sunlight. There is an ambivalent gaze in his eyes. Breaking conventions, there is no reverse shot of his wife or anyone else waiting for him outside the prison. The film simply ends on a freeze frame with titles superimposed telling us that he was deported to Mexico for many years, and that when he was finally allowed to return, his application for a pardon for his conviction was denied by the U.S. government. This final shot and title sequence set up a thought-provoking open ending to the story, tying the issue of cultural self-determination to a continuing historical dynamic in the present.[18] The titles let us know that González is still alive, yet, to this day, remains unpardoned and without a radio show/ forum or voice.[19]

In *BREAK OF DAWN* the importance of remembrance and its connection to identity formation are tantamount. The protagonist of the film establishes the link between the Mexican Revolution and Chicano resistance in the U.S. His character embodies what Teshome Gabriel refers to as the "screening of memory" which enforces and continues meaningful subjectivity begun in the past and extended into the future.[20] Gabriel stresses that this type of preoccupation with history by Third World filmmakers confirms their faith in the value of constant struggle. One can see that the interpretation carries over into an understanding of *BREAK OF DAWN* and the director's decision to make an historical narrative chronicling the struggle for Spanish-language radio programming at a time when the English-only movement and the Simpson-Rodino Immigration Act were foremost in the minds of many Latinos. Drawing connections between past acts of resistance and present situations underscores the filmmaker's own commitment to the notion of agency in Chicano/a art and to produce a product which is informed by both a linguistic- and classed-based analysis of Chicano/a history.

NOTES

1. I refer to these films as a social justice genre, wherein the protagonist becomes the focal point of systematic social injustice. *SANDINO* (1990), *MAPANTSULA* (1987), *UNDER FIRE* (1983), *THE KILLING FIELDS* (1984) would be encompassed in the genre. Many of these films also fall within what Claudia Springer has identified as the Third World investigation film genre which typically positions the spectator in the role of cultural outsider identifying with the reporter/protagonist who acts as interpreter of the foreign experience. Claudia Springer, "Comprehension and Crisis: Reporter Films and the Third World," in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, ed. Lester Friedman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 167-190.
2. Jorge Ayala Blanco, "Artenstein y el Mito del Cine Chicano," *El Financiero*, 10 Sept. 1990, Cultural Sec., p.71.
3. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Book Co., 1987), p. 54.
4. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Tomás Ybarra-Frausto on Mestizaje," *Cine de Mestizaje* (NY: El Museo del Barrio, 1991), p. 26.
5. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo contained democratic guarantees, which could have allowed for an integration of Chicano/a culture into the larger society. It

contained provisions to protect the land, language, religious and political rights of the conquered Mexicans living in the Southwest

6. Felix Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago* (Notre Dame: University of Noire Dame Press, 1985), pp. 61-79.

7. For further discussion of the use of Spanish as a competing alternative public discourse see, Flores and Yúdice, "Living Borders/ Buscando America: Languages of Latino Self-formation," *Social Text: Theory/ Culture/ Ideology* 8.2 (1990): 57-84.

8. Ironically, it has been the colonialist-like aggression of the U.S. which has caused multiple Latino identities to become collective as one strategy for ethnic survival.

9. The main organization behind the English-only Movement is "U.S. English." Claiming more than 300,000 dues paying members, the predominantly Anglo organization hired a Chicana, Linda Chavez (former Reagan appointee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission), as its national spokesperson. The group has been successful in obtaining the passage of English-only laws in California and Florida, states with high Latino populations. According to Teresa Montano and Dennis Vigil the fundamental reason for the attack on Spanish speaking Americans is because Latinos pose a strategic threat to monopoly capitalist control of the southwestern United States. They argue that the Latino population explosion in the sunbelt region will destabilize the area leading massive Chicano uprisings in the next century. This threat is understood by the Anglo bourgeoisie, and, hence, the upsurge in efforts to acculturate Chicanos by decimating their language. See "English-only: Right Wing's Power of Babble," in *Forward: A Journal of Socialist Thought* 8 (Spring, 1988): 51-83.

10. The Simpson-Rodino law mandated strong penalties against employers of "illegal" immigrants. The bill has been criticized by Chicano groups who say that it unfairly targets Mexican immigrants and promotes anti-Latino sentiment throughout the country.

11. Since 1929, U.S. policy towards Mexican immigration has vacillated considerably. During periods of economic prosperity when labor shortages occurred in the southwest, Mexicans have been encouraged to cross the border. When the economic climate shifts, Mexican immigrants have been and continue to be expelled in large numbers. For an historical account of this immigration history see Juan Ramón García, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); and Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican-Americans in the Great Depression* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1974).

12. The Mexican Revolution was a major factor in the displacement of Mexicans to the U.S. Many soldiers and supporters of revolutionary leaders like Villa, Obregón, Carranza and Zapata fled political persecution from their own government. It is probable that close to one million Mexicans crossed over into the United States between 1910 and 1920 although a publication of the National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc. puts the number closer to two hundred thousand. See Meier and

Rivera, *The Chicanos: A History of Mexican Americans*, p. 235.

13. For instance, the Magón brothers published *Regeneración in San Antonio, St. Louis and El Paso*. Later, while in Los Angeles, Ricardo Flores Magón published *La Revolución*. In southeastern Arizona, Praxedis Guerero organized copper miners into a union called Obreros Libres (Free Workers). See Meier and Rivera, *The Chicanos*, p. 119-123.

14. Annando Navarro, "The Evolution of Chicano Politics," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 5 (Fall 1972): 61.

15. The Mexican Constitution of 1917 gave the Mexican nation exclusive rights to subsoil minerals.

16. Kenneth F. Johnson, *Mexican Democracy: A Critical View* (New York: Praeger, 1978), p. 44.

17. For an explanation of how these references play a part in Chicano Art see *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* (Los Angeles: UCLA Wight Art Gallery, 1990).

18. This ending is unconventional from two standpoints. From a Hollywood standpoint, it is clichéd to show a man released after being wrongly convicted go to his wife or family. In a more leftist film, one would expect to have him reunite with the community that he sacrificed for and who pushed for his release.

19. For further discussion of Spanish language radio stations in the U.S. see Felix Gutiérrez and Jorge Reina Schemendt, *Spanish Language Radio in the United States* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979).

20. Teshome Gabriel, "Thesis on Memory and Identity: In Search of the Origin of the River Nile," *Emergences* 1: 130-137.

El Teatro Campesino's *La Pastorela* Nation and virgin as great performances

by Kathleen Newman

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 87-91

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On December 23, 1991, the Public Broadcasting System aired EL TEATRO CAMPESINO'S LA PASTORELA: A SHEPHERD'S TALE as the seventh new program of the season in its Great Performances series.[1][[open notes in new window](#)] El Teatro Campesino, an internationally renown theater troupe, has presented bilingual theatrical versions of the *pastorela* at the San Bautista Mission in California since 1975. The decision to make a television special of the *pastorela* signals a new phase in the cultural politics of the Teatro, one of the most interesting aspects of which is the appropriation of an explicitly latina activist discourse to combat a monolithic concept of our national culture, a concept inherent in the Great Performances series, as we shall see below, despite the obvious commitment to diversity of the producers of the series.

I would like to examine two interrelated aspects of the Teatro's televisual *pastorela*: (1) the gender politics of the drama itself, and, specifically, the representation of the Virgin; and (2) the television special as part of the Teatro's ongoing political project to change the definition of our national culture, specifically, how the concept of performance is deployed to transform the public sphere in the United States-understanding public sphere to be that current spatial metaphor for the utopia wherein all members of the nation are inscribed, albeit serially, as *equal* citizens.

The broadcast of EL TEATRO CAMPESINO'S LA PASTORELA on December 23 was followed by a very brief documentary, EL TEATRO CAMPESINO: LOOKING BACK AFTER 25 YEARS, written and directed by El Teatro Campesino founder and artistic director Luis Valdez. The documentary, employing archival footage of the early days of the Teatro, highlights the Teatro's first *actos* with the United Farmworkers, the establishment of the Teatro's permanent home in San Juan Bautista, the Teatro's twenty-year anniversary celebration, and the training of the next generation of actors/activists. Having stressed the Teatro's commitment to family and to the "humility of the campesinos," the documentary ends with the following voiceover narration by Valdez:

"Like the past, the future belongs to those who can imagine it. The Teatro is now creating films and videos which we call electronic theater in order to embrace that past and create that future. El Teatro

Campesino stands at the threshold of the twenty-first century, its hands in the earth and its heart in the sky."

This poetic contextualization of the Teatro's televisual *pastorela*, directed by Valdez and produced by Richard Sow, starkly contrasts, of course, with that of *Entertainment Weekly* in its schedule of television programs the week prior to the showing:

"Here's the best new Christmas special of the year; a boldly unconventional version of a *pastorela*, or shepherd's tale, the centuries-old Spanish variation on the Nativity story. Writer-director Luis Valdez (LA BAMBA; ZOOTOPIA) has brought the tale up to date by centering it on Gila (STAND AND DELIVER's Karla Montana), a poor Mexican girl who has a vision of the angel St. Michael, played in glowing white wings and without a trace of campiness by Linda Ronstadt... it deserves to become an annual TV event." [2]

The New York Times, more circumspect, wrote:

"Luis Valdez's musical retelling of the journey of the shepherds to Bethlehem; with Linda Ronstadt, Paul Rodriguez and Cheech Marin." [3]

Neither *Entertainment Weekly* nor *The New York Times* mentions that this *pastorela* is an adaptation of El Teatro Campesino's theatrical production, or that what may seem "unconventional" in the production is, in fact, a theatrical style. Neither mentions the role of the Teatro in the Chicano politics and culture in over twenty-five years (with *Entertainment Weekly* going so far as to designate the character of Gila as Mexican rather than Chicana or Mexican-American). Both stress Valdez' reputation and the national fame of some of the singers and actors involved in the production. For neither is this an event deserving of greater note than any other television special.

In fact, the "performance" should have been of great national note. While it is certainly not the first time the Teatro's work has appeared in PBS, the inclusion of the Teatro's *pastorela* in the Great Performances series associates the Teatro with a national program whose status, in its own advertising in the national press, is simultaneously that conservator of U.S. cultural heritages and promoter of a transnationalist appreciation of popular culture. Indeed, there was extensive advertising for the six preceding programs of Great Performances — EVERYBODY DANCE NOW: VIDEO DANCE FROM JAMES BROWN TO M. C. HAMMER; Paul McCartney's LIVERPOOL ORATORIO; Paul Taylor's SPEAKING IN TONGUES; A CARNEGIE HALL CHRISTMAS; Samuel Barber's ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA; and Lorca's THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA. In these ads, the *pastorela* was recontextualized, by adjacency, as simultaneously akin to lyric opera and oratorio, African American choreography and popular dance, and Spanish drama.

While each program in itself necessarily expressed a specific politics of culture, the Great Performances programming sequence suggests that the works of U.S. artists included here are to be considered part of an transnational repertoire: transnational, rather than international, because the national origin of each work — the specificity of the historical conjuncture of its creation — gives way before an

emphasis on the repertoire of an elite cultural network. For example, Lorca's drama is advertised not as a work of Spanish drama — or translation thereof (with a historically-specific analysis of gender and class power asymmetries) — but as a vehicle for the actress Glenda Jackson. So too, this *pastorela* was not advertised as an achievement within the Chicano cultural movement or U.S. theater history, but as a vehicle for Linda Ronstadt, Paul Rodriguez, Cheech Marin and Freddy Fender. While it is not surprising that the national name recognition of two singers and two comedians, as well as Valdez' work as a film director, would structure the promotional materials for the *pastorela*, the seeming media disinterest in the Teatro's history, and in the causes the Teatro has promoted, serves to foment an elite version of the national culture, one in which aesthetic qualities — here, high television production values — are expected not to be infused with political content. Though the producers of the Great Performances series, by means of the programs they have selected, may well be working against an elite definition of our always diverse national culture, the series itself defines culture monolithically.

Fortunately, the Teatro achieved in its televisual production of the *pastorela* exactly the opposite of a homogenized "great performance" or "instant popular classic." Though El Teatro Campesino's televisual *pastorela* is twice removed from its original community performance context, the Teatro was able retain the vitality of the theatrical and community performances. It did so, as we will see below, through alternations, on the one hand, of a relatively jaded manipulation of star discourse with a quite serious valorization of the work of latino artists, and, on the other, of the narrative deployment of citations of Hollywood films and Chicano art with an inventive address to the audience, which we might call "iconic address."

Also, the televisual *pastorela* adds to the theatrical *pastorela* a framing story, that of Gila, a contemporary, disaffected teenager who rediscovers the importance of family. Given that Gila is the daughter of farmworkers and lives "in the camp outside of town," the televisual *pastorela* makes explicit class divisions in the United States. Impressively, the Teatro's televisual *pastorela* transforms a "musical retelling of the journey of the shepherds to Bethlehem" into a examination of the political implications of the "humility of the campesinos."

In tone, save for the final encounter with the Virgin and the *niño* Jesus, the televisual *pastorela* is principally comic. The framing story, which some consider a citation of THE WIZARD OF OZ[5], concerns an teenager, Gila, who is upset because her family cannot afford other than cheap gifts for her younger brothers and sisters at Christmas. She resents her family's poverty and misunderstands her parents' geniality and affirmation of community. When Gila is hit on head accidentally during a midnight performance of the *pastorela* at the Mission (i.e., ETC's theatrical *pastorela*), she dreams that she journeys, as one of the *pastores*, to Bethlehem — thus enacting the *pastorela* — and, after speaking with the Virgin, awakens to find her faith in family and community renewed. In Gila's *pastorela*, the *pastores* and hermit with whom she travels are rescued three times by San Miguel from their tragicomic encounters with Satanás (Paul Rodríguez) and Luzbel (Robert Beltrán). Though the underlying topics of the encounters may be quite serious (abuse of paternal authority, alcoholism, sexism, sexual abuse, etc.), most of them are filmed with comic intent and are signaled as broadly comic.

For example, when Gilda's father, Bartolo, is possessed by a large devil, his body is

so inflated that the *pastores* have to sing him to his feet so he can accompany them. In another comic moment, in an encounter with El Cósmico (Cheech Marin), a con artist pretending to be one of the three wise men, there is a slapstick chase scene (bedeviled *pastores* running after belly dancers). As a wry test of young love, Gilda's "pastoral" love interest, Bato, is transformed by Satanás into a cholo[6] in a red, low-rider Chevy who drives away with a *diabla* to the tune of "Black Magic Woman." This signaled comic intent — as opposed to the work's humor (some of which is sexist and some of which deploys stereotypes in problematic ways) — serves two purposes.

First, it affirms not only the "humility of the campesino" but the innate *wisdom* of such humility, of campesino values. The good sense and good humor of the *pastores* can only be overcome by Satanás' illusions temporarily: the solidarity of the pueblo ultimately is not undermined by the temptations of wealth. Second, it defers the contemporary audiences' confrontation with a patriarchal gender system. Specifically, the contemporary audience is not required to assess the meaning of the insistence in the text of Gila's "purity" as a virgin until such time in the narrative that this "purity" can be configured as feminist.

This is one of the most interesting aspect of the Teatro's televisual *pastorela*: the creation of a televisual icon of the Virgin, the very iconicity of which subtly shifts a predominantly patriarchal narrative into a feminist address. The early references in the dream sequence to Gila as the Virgin ("our innocent one") become explicit when, toward the end, Gila tells the Virgin Mary that the child Jesus reminds her of her baby brother. This is the baby whose life the audience knows Gila has saved from the falling lectern that knocked Gila unconscious and precipitated the embedded *pastorela* that the audience is viewing. When Gila returns to consciousness, she is in the Mission, surrounded by her family and the actors from the theatrical *pastorela* in the same fashion as the manger scene and, indeed, her baby brother is placed into her arms. However, what appears as a tableau of female subservience within a patriarchal family actually mobilizes a latina feminist discourse. Here, not only is the family figured as equivalent to the community and therefore a place of security against the race and class oppression of the larger society, but women are figured as the activists whose gender politics enable both resistance to oppression and social change.

This latter figuration is achieved through the televisual *pastorela*'s manipulation of the specific icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This icon from Mexican and Mexican-American popular and religious culture was promoted as a political symbol by Chicano muralists in the sixties and seventies, then transformed by feminist artists in the eighties into perhaps *the* image of latina feminism. The televisual *pastorela* cites Yolanda López's well-known tripartite representation of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a young woman jogger (herself), a seamstress (her mother) at work, and a seated elderly woman (her grandmother) to suggest, from the opening sequence, in which Gila is shown jogging home, that Gila is a feminist. What artist and critic Amalia Mesa-Rains has written of López' work is no less true of its citation in EL TEATRO CAMPESINO'S LA PASTORELA:

"López's Guadalupes are mobile, hardworking, assertive, working class images...This repositioning becomes both satire and provocation, while retaining the transfigurative liberation of the icon. By breaking the

bonds of Guadalupe and setting her free, López attests to the internal familiarity of the image and the powerful influence on her own family members. The art in this series does not simply reflect an existing ideology; it actively constructs a new one. It attests to the critique of traditional Mexican women's roles and religious oppression in a self-fashioning of new identities."[7]

Gila's "self-fashioning," presented at the level of plot as a feminist reaction to the male *pastores'* seeing domestic labor as women's responsibility and as her own exorcism of the "devil in her" that prevents her from appreciating her family (as *campesinos humildes*), becomes in the final scene of the program an explicit address to the audience. After all the characters have said their goodbyes in the courtyard of the Mission (and Gila's has invited the new boyfriend Bato to tamales with her family), the shots recreate the three feminist generations, showing first Gila, then her mother, and, finally, Linda Ronstadt, as the "real" San Miguel, hovering over the Mission, ascending, sword drawn, to be a matriarchal protective star over Gila's farmworker family. The closure of the Teatro's televisual *pastorela* depends on the feminist version of the Virgin of Guadalupe in which three generations of women remake the world. Moreover, in a final close up of Ronstadt as the female higher power, Ronstadt looks directly at the audience and smiles. Critique and self-fashioning becomes an address to the national audience, interrogating the audience's self-knowledge, its knowledge of the various identities of which the national culture constantly refashioned.

This highly political address to the audience is sustained by the combination of a *rasquache* (barrio vernacular) aesthetic and the concept of performance expressed through the televisual *pastorela*. As Tomás Ybarra-Frausto has argued in "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility,"

"Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino were among the first to recognize and give universal significance to the multifaceted, bittersweet experiences of la plebe (the working class). A *rasquache* sensibility both deliberate and unconscious marked the presentational style, tone, and worldview of El Teatro Campesino. Achingly beautiful theatrical actos (skits) captured the tragicomic spirit of barrio life. In a dialectical interplay of social fact and mythic-religious overtones, actos became scenarios of ethnic redemption and social resurrection."[8]

EL TEATRO CAMPESINO'S LA PASTORELA, while maintaining high production values, works against the elite aesthetics generally associated with the Great Performances series (see, for example, the set design of LA CASA DE BERNARDA ALBA) by employing in the dream sequence *rasquache* costumes, set design, and special effects: Ronstadt's angel costume is a cross between a Roman soldier and high school cheerleader with Christmas-pageant "homemade" wings; Luzbel resides in a just-down-the-road, Mad-Max-Meets-Las-Vegas inferno; Luzbel and San Miguel fight each other with effects right out of bad science fiction films from the fifties (with a laser-eyes stare-fight and the mirror image of bad theatrical make-up clinching the final battle between good and evil). But it is clear from the interweaving of the levels of community, theatrical, and televisual performance in this Great Performances *pastorela* that the *rasquache* aesthetic purposefully foregrounds the Teatro's definition of performance as the transformation of the

place of performance; the public sphere. The *rasquache* aesthetic effectively dismisses any attempt at Great Performance cultural homogenization, i.e., the Teatro is not performing for a unitary cultural space, but for the chaotic, undeniably *rasquache*, truly inventive, everyday space inhabited all citizens. While a community *pastorela* extends the traditions of the *pueblo* (foregrounding the diachronic) and the Teatro's theatrical *pastorela* affirms Chicano culture (foregrounding the synchronic), the Teatro's televisual *pastorela* does both of former and goes a step further, asserting what sectors of U.S. society deny: our national identity is, and has always been, multiracial, multilingual, multicultural.

Luis Valdez, in a section on training young actors in the brief documentary EL TEATRO CAMPESINO: LOOKING BACK AFTER 25 YEARS, which followed the televisual *pastorela*, expressed a practical, "do what you can do" philosophy of performance; the attempt itself will define the limits of what is possible. This "popular" wisdom is evident in the shifts in star discourse within the Great Performances production. As mentioned above, the advertising, focusing on only four of latino stars, indicated that these stars among the various members of the cast were considered, at least by PBS, to have national name recognition. Thus, in part, the casting did "what could be done" in preparing the reception of the production at the national level. The portion of the audience not Spanish-English bilingual might watch the show for the participation of the Ronstadt, Rodriguez, Marin, and Fender. The latino audience might have been interested in the show for these stars as well as Robert Beltrán, Lalo Guerrero, Flaco Jimenez, Lupe Ontiveros, and Little Joe and the Familia with Dr. Loco (José Cuellar), among others. However, in the dream sequence, after the *pastores* have three times been saved by Saint Linda, Valdez radically shifts the tone of the production by means of introducing an explicitly latino star discourse. After the *rasquache* portrayal of the comic events leading to the defeat of Luzbel and his banishment from the earth, when the *pastores* have arrived at twilight at Bethlehem (a barn in California's farmland), the camera very slowly pans across the faces of the "Star Latino Pastores" to slower, more sacred music than has been heard previously.

The audience is given the opportunity to witness on the faces of the latino actors, *as stars*, that mixture of the sacred and the secular which create "scenarios of ethnic redemption and social resurrection." The close ups serve to let the star express the emotions of the *pueblo*, to embody the collective — quite a different attitude towards, and definition of, celebrity than that of the entertainment industry as a whole. Thus, when the *pastores* enter the barn, finding Joseph and Mary to be campesinos and the Holy Family to be surrounded by people who are clearly not actors, but rather farmworkers, redemption is both sacred and secular: the Christ story expresses "the humility of the campesinos." Light comedy has given way to serious politics: the sacred and secular combine in the *pueblo*, power is in the *pueblo*. Humility, then — being humble in nature and in (class) origin — defines that power.

In the final section of the dream sequence *pastorela*, the passion of Christ, seen though the crown of thorns, and Luzbel's final song before his banishment, filmed in close up on the actor's face (Beltrán), at last neither distorted by the black veil or appurtenances of demonic, "ugly" makeup, are moments meant to resonate with other, more grand, less humble representations of the story of Christ. Yet this latter emphasis on evil having a human face, in combination with the analysis of power

presented in the *pastorela*, also serves to make the location and definition of the audience extremely important in the production of meaning. By synthesizing of community and theatrical *pastorela* in the program for a national television audience, the Teatro stressed the value of seeing the national *as if it were the local*. The national performance is suggested to be the same as a performance for one's community, to create the same sense of equality among audience members. Thus the address to the audience is radically democratic.

Yet this radically democratic address, in turn, reveals that, in the Teatro's televisual *pastorela*, the Virgin, too, becomes but a performance: teenage joggers, campesina mothers, and feminist angels — the contemporary matriarchal trinity which undercuts the reconstitution of the patriarchal family — are only momentarily sacred figures. In the final scenes, the deployment of Lopez' three virgins in the Mission courtyard is counterbalanced by the casual presence of Father Guido Sarducci (comedian Don Novello), that is, by the Father who is not a father. Thus, the "iconic address" of Saint Linda/ San Miguel, who is the Patriarch who cannot be a patriarch, (that is, Ronstadt's smile to the viewers) projects outward to a newly fashioned, once-and-again imagined public space in the United States. In that public space, "at the threshold of the twenty-first century," El Teatro Campesino has projected a nation structured by a sense of community, not divided by gender, not dividing the sacred from the secular. Performance, then, in EL TEATRO CAMPESINO'S LA PASTORELA: A SHEPHERD'S TALE is for the present nation, but formative of a future, more just nation.

NOTES

LA PASTORELA: A SHEPHERD'S TALE can be purchased for \$19.95 and rented for \$9.95 from El Teatro Campesino. For further information regarding other Teatro Campesino flints and videos, contact Tina Sandoval, El Teatro Campesino. PO Box 1240. 705 Fourth Street, San Juan Bautista, CA 95045. 408/623-2444. Fax: 408/623-4127 (editors' note].

1. A version of this article was presented at the first "Console-ing Passions: Television, Video and Feminist Studies" national conference, organized by Julie D'Acci, Mary Beth Haralovich, Lauren Rabinovitz, and Lynn Spigel, University of Iowa, April 3-4, 1992.
2. No. 97 (Dec. 20. 1991), pp. 62-63.
3. National edition, Sunday, Dec. 22, 1991. p. 20Y.
4. *The New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, Nov. 29, 1991.
5. I believe the differences between Dorothy's adventures in OZ and Gilda's journey to Bethlehem, in terms of narrative events or approach to (sacred) authority, are so great that this citation serves but to locate this story as "American."
6. This negative figuration of *cholos* contrasts with their positive image in much of Chicano art. See Marcos Sánchez-Tranquilino and John Tagg, "The Pachuco's Flayed Hide: The Museum, Identity, and Buenas Garras," particularly Figure 7, in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985*, eds. Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (Los Angeles: UCLA Wight

Gallery, 1991), pp. 97-108.

7. "El Mundo Feminino: Chicana Artists of the Movement — A Commentary on Development," *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985*, p. 137. See also the interview with Lz5pez in the documentary CHICANO PARK, co-produced by Marilyn Mulford and Mario Barrera, 1988.

8. *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation. 1965-1985*, p. 159.

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American Me Despair in the barrio

by Carmen Huaco-Nuzum

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 92-94

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Reminiscent of film noir in which the hero recounts his story through the use of flashbacks, *AMERICAN ME* opens with a medium close up of the main character Santana, played by Edward James Olmos, seated in his maximum security cell a short time before he is killed by other chicano inmates. Through the use of a female voice over, later identified as the chicana Julie (Evelina Fernandez) with whom he has an affair, we are allowed to enter Santana's internal consciousness in which Julie's voice says,

"You are like two people, the one who doesn't know how to dance or how to make love...that is the one I care about. The other one I hate... the one who runs drugs and knows how to kill people."

Through a series of flashbacks and flashforwards, Santana's life unfolds, from the beginning of his life in the barrio to the present of his prison cell.

Santana is a composite of many histories and complex social realities, which have made him who he is: a killer and a victim of his environment and social conditioning. Santana presents a stoic facade perfectly executed by Olmos, a figure devoid of affect who, when threatened by perceived danger, is able to mobilize quickly as a panther to disarm and exterminate his adversary — whether it be a member of his own "familia" or a rival gang.

AMERICAN ME is centered on a male discourse, and Olmos has succeeded in providing the viewer with a glimpse into the complex formation of a mexican chicano hood. He borrows liberally from Octavio Paz' "The Sons of La Malinche" by portraying Santana as the archetypal mestizo product of the violent union between two cultures, who serves throughout the narrative as the vehicle for Paz' discourse.

Through flashbacks we return to Los Angeles, California and the period of the pachuco persecutions to witness the rape of Santana's mother by a group of white sailors. Rejected by his chicano stepfather and a reminder to his mother of her violation, Santana in vain searches for the father and mother who have emotionally abandoned him. In retaliation he establishes his own "familia" through the "klike," who in the end betray him when Santana shows signs of vulnerability by sparing the life of a gang member who is responsible for his re-incarceration.

The "klika" interpret Santana's action as a sign of weakness, which reflects back onto them as a group, decentralizing their established modes of functioning. For it is through their use of brutal force and antisocial behavior that they survive and maintain positions of power within the Mexican mafia subculture. Thus Santana becomes a liability to the "klika" after he meets the Chicana and former gang member, Julie, because she is able to get him in touch with both sides of his character, both his brutality and the capability to feel, which he covers up with a shield of impenetrable machismo.

After meeting Julie, Santana toys with the idea of reintegrating back into society. In a touching scene, Julie guides Santana across the dance floor as he awkwardly moves with the music like a wounded bird. Again, the problematic of gender responsibility emerges once more through the male discourse of AMERICAN ME, to imply that Julie, as woman, is responsible for taming and socializing the wild beast harbored inside Santana.

In another scene with Julie, Santana conveys his justification for destroying human life, even a member of his own group, as long as it gains him respect and status for his "klika." "I was proud not to let my feelings get in the way," he tells Julie. "Killing one of our own gained us more respect." The laws of the criminal subculture pits friend against friend, brother against brother as Santana further confesses to Julie, "We cannot accept that we are weak, but it is worse to have others believe we are weak." What emerges out of this dialogue is a transcultural legacy of the conquest, which, as a people, we have not been able to shake off our backs. For *raza* folk continue to function from a position of "de los de abajo," as opportunity to rise to the top is continually denied and suppressed by social institutions of power.

On the outside, Santana's impenetrable armor prevents him from adjusting to daily social interactions, whereby he continues to function more by instinct than by reason to internal and external forces which he perceives as threatening. This is played out in a scene in which Julie helps Santana find a more stylish pair of shoes. Santana forgets he is outside of the prison and when informed by the salesman to wait his turn, he quickly reacts confrontationally ready to disarm his adversary, whom he interprets as being disrespectful. Santana is at war with himself and with society at large. He is unable to distinguish the inside/outside spaces of his social environment. The film attempts to convey the ongoing polemic that prisons only harden the individual by rendering them antisocial and unable to re-adjust to the social community outside the prison.

Santana's position of power is more vulnerable on the outside because the stakes are higher and the racial denominators and borderlines are not as clearly defined as inside the prison. On the outside, Santana is also exposed to human beings like Julie who help to put him off center. Santana is unable to reconcile the two sides of his character; he is only familiar with the brutal unfeeling aspect of his personality. This concern is voiced by Santana when he informs Julie, "I loved it in there," referring to his position inside the prison as leader of the Mexican mafia. Inside prison, Santana is able to define who he is in relation to others through his acts of brutality, acts which help to enhance his power. And his self esteem is nurtured by the adulation which he receives from the Chicano criminals for whom he represents a role model and paternal figure. However, back in prison Santana allows himself

to feel compassion, for which, in the end, he is killed by his own familia of hoods who, as members of a marginalized prison group, now perceive him as weak, and thus a threat to their position of power, which they must maintain to survive.

Julie and Santana serve as catalysts for each other. She helps to awaken in him feelings of hope and Santana, in turn, assists Julie to see her potential. For Santana the only escape out of the barrio is through violence and death. Olmos portrays the chicano male as an endangered species with some degree of validity, given the national statistics on chicano youth. However, Olmos manipulates the character of Julie to offer the chicana spectator a possibility of escape out of the barrio through the pursuit of higher education.

The problematic representation of chicanas, with the exception of Julie, are portrayed as Octavio Paz describes them:

"...woman is never herself, whether lying stretched out or standing up straight, whether naked or fully clothed. She is an undifferentiated manifestation of life, a channel for the universal appetite. In this sense, she has no desires of her own." [1]

The mexicana, according to Paz, appears to be historically bound to subservient passivity inherit in the legacy of being "la chingada" or the violated woman-the passive, long suffering female in servitude to the macho. This form of passive female representation is best exemplified by the portrayal of Santana's mother and the wife of one of the mexicano hood members who, on the night of her wedding, is unable to articulate her disgust while she silently watches her inebriated husband engage in histrionic outbursts. However, the portrayal of the chicana Julie stands out in sharp contrast to the other chicana characters as she is able to exercise her desire and agency over the social forces which function to keep her trapped inside the barrio. Nevertheless, as previously noted, *AMERICAN ME* problematically represents the chicana when it assigns sole responsibility to the character of Julie as the only vehicle out of the barrio.

The theme of rape functions throughout the narrative (physical, social, moral and racial) to convey that the mestiza/mestizo cannot divest itself easily from the legacy of the Spanish conquest until social institutions of power begin to re-address their relationship to the social needs of the mestiza and mestizo american in contemporary society.

The most difficult and violent scenes of the film are played out in the inside and outside social spaces of prison and Julie's bedroom. The love scene between Julie and Santana is shown in parallel action to the events that unfold inside the prison. What begins as a love scene between Santana and Julie is quickly accelerated into an act of violence. Santana, symbolically becomes the "chingon" of Paz who

"rips open the chingada, the female who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world. The relationship between them is violent, and it is determined by the cynical power of the first and the impotence of the second" (Octavio Paz, p. 77).

The strength of the mexicana, according to Paz, lies not in resisting the violence of her male assailant, but rather in her stoic inaudible passivity and endurance to

pain. (Octavio Paz, pp. 38-39). But Paz' description of the mexicana does not fully apply to the character of Julie. Santana makes love to Julie with all the violence and rage he has internalized and in the end sodomizes her while she struggles in vain against his physical power.

The sexual tension of this scene is contrapuntally played out against the prison scene in which the son of the Italian mafia boss, on orders of Santana, is first sodomized and then killed by the chicano mafia hoods who ram a knife up his rectum at the same moment in which we watch Santana reach orgasm. It is through her rape that Julie awakens to the reality that Santana's character, formed out of violence, will remain violent, unable to function inside the perimeters of a society which demands other codes of behavior. After the rape scene Julie terminates her relationship with Santana but he is unable to understand the violence of his actions. Confused by Julie's assertive initiative to disengage from him and pursue her desires, Santana, once more, recoils back into the stoic silence of wounded macho.

AMERICAN ME raises multiple concerns regarding issues of race, sexual desire, homosexuality, socio-cultural problems and only subtly touches on conflicts of gender and the homoerotic relationship between Santana and JD, his anglo carnal childhood friend who ultimately betrays him when he gives the order for Santana's execution.

The film ends with a tragic message on the present social conditions of the barrio; and the younger male generation who, like Santana's younger brother, characterizes the chicano adolescent hood that will follow male role models established by the mexican mafia. Kid Frost's musical rendition of "There ain't no sunshine" reinforces the theme of despair of the chicano male trapped between the criminal atmosphere of prison and the drug-infested environment of the barrio. The implicit socio-political message in AMERICAN ME conveys that the economic and racial marginalization of the chicano and chicana in the barrio functions as a form of social containment built into the socio-economic apparatus to prevent the mexican/american from ever achieving parity or integration with the rest of society.

NOTES

1. *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 37.

Strategies for Latino screenwriters ¡Ya basta con the Hollywood paradigm!

by Charles Ramirez Berg

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 96-104

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"The simple act of reaching the mainstream is not in itself liberating. It is one of the tactics we should adopt within a theory of human liberation. What we must do is struggle for a different system and present alternatives to the existing system. Our artistic productions should subvert dominant ideology rather than reproduce it."

— Rosa Linda Fregoso[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

FROM MANIFESTO TO MAINSTREAM

In the 1970s, Chicano filmmaking manifestos rejected the Hollywood filmmaking paradigm as aggressively imperialist, racist and oppressive. Influenced by Latin American filmmakers and theorists such as Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino and Jorge Sanjinés, Chicano cinema cast itself as a revolutionary cinema of opposition. [2] This strategy led Chicano filmmakers to explore non-narrative, non-mainstream forms, particularly the documentary (following the lead of Cuban documentarians), and provided an accessible way for Latino filmmakers with limited resources to begin making films. In focusing on the Chicano experience, first generation filmmakers helped define and affirm Chicanos, *chicanismo* and *el movimiento*.

Since those manifestos were written, though, Latinos have entered a new phase in their filmmaking development. Several radical Chicano filmmakers of the 1970s have entered the Hollywood mainstream. Moctesuma Esparza has produced *THE MILAGRO BEANFIELD WAR* (1988), Luis Valdez has written and directed *ZOOT SUIT* (1981) and *LA BAMBA* (1987), and Jesús Salvador Treviño directed an episode of the television series "Gabriel's Fire" (1990) and was nominated for an Emmy for *GANGS* (1988), a CBS "Schoolbreak Special." A second generation, led by Gregory Nava (*EL NORTE*, 1984; *A TIME OF DESTINY*, 1988) and Isaac Artenstein (*BREAK OF DAWN*, 1988) have followed with impressive features of their own. In Chon A. Noriega's analysis, what transpired was that the Chicano film manifestos provided "a *raison d'être* and critical perspective that guided students into the university and filmmakers into the American film industry." [3] That trend continues. In increasing numbers, Latinos are enrolling in film and television production programs at universities and workshops across the country.

Can filmmakers of color work within the dominant Hollywood paradigm and counter a system of representation that has denigrated them for decades? Over the course of film history a fair number of mainstream films have effectively critiqued the system, and there is no reason why we can't continue in that tradition. The real question is how. How can Chicano screenwriters begin making a difference in mainstream filmmaking practice? "How," as Charles Burnett so eloquently puts it, "does one who is dissatisfied with the way things are going set about transforming society?"[4] For filmmakers of color, that is the fundamental creative and political question.

A screenwriter myself, I find that I spend a lot of time devising practical answers to that question — ways to avoid stereotyping and promote tolerance and diversity in a form that general audiences will find both pleasing and entertaining. Screenwriting texts are no help, obsessed as they are with three-act dramatic structure, character development and dialogue. For all their detailed discussions about "pinches" and plot points, crises and confrontations, *not one* of these manuals raises questions about the ideological implications of the dominant narrative paradigm they are so intent on reproducing.[5] For the most part, college scriptwriting courses follow suit, training students to write "professional," i.e. Hollywood, scripts.

With a few exceptions, they are notoriously lacking when it comes to addressing — or even acknowledging — the problems of mainstream cinema's depiction of women and minorities. Other than echoing scriptwriting handbooks, academic discourse on screenwriting has had little to say on the matter.[6]

As scriptwriters of color working within the industry, then, our work is effectively doubled. For credibility's sake, we must master the dominant screenwriting paradigm. But in order to alter its pervasive stereotyping, we also need to question it wherever and whenever we can. This essay sketches out some of the screen writing ideas I've had about how to modify the Hollywood narrative paradigm that are — potentially at least — progressive and subversive.

I am building on the suggestions made in Francisco X. Campos' "Towards the Development of a Raza Cinema," where he defines the aims of the revolutionary cinema he espouses,[7] and Linda Artel and Susan Wengraf's *Positive Images: Screening Women's Films*, which provides a list of progressive ways to reverse sexism in educational films.[8] I am also incorporating notions from critics who have written about the ways progressive filmmaking can counter the denigration of women, gays and people of color.[9] One key difference between those approaches and mine, however, is that their prescriptions were largely for independent or Third Cinema, whereas I am addressing filmmakers who work (or wish to work) within the Hollywood system.

The classical Hollywood narrative is built upon the tradition of the nineteenth century well-made play that fairly rigidly insists on the steady progression of exposition, conflict, complication, crisis and denouement. In the Hollywood instance, as David Bordwell has pointed out, a goal-oriented hero desires "something new to his/her situation, or the hero seeks to restore an original state of affairs." [10] Though Bordwell doesn't dwell on this, that hero is usually the dominant's ideal — Anglo, male, heterosexual, upscale, Protestant, capitalist, etc. I

want to open up Bordwell's narratology by noting the ideological significance of the narrative norms he describes, and I want to interrogate the classic scriptwriting elements that Mario Barrera succinctly delineated in "Story Structure in Latino Feature Films." [11] In effect, I hope this article will serve as a companion piece to Barren's. If he describes the poetics of Hollywood narrative practice as applied to Chicano feature films, then mine seeks to provide strategies for manipulating the formula to serve progressive ends.

For in the last analysis, the framers of the Chicano manifestos were right — Hollywood's is an insidious cinema, which hegemonically bends compliant filmmakers to its built-in conservative agenda. It is a dangerous and a mightily powerful apparatus, but one that can, I believe, be discreetly re-programmed to undermine that conservatism. To do so, though, Latino filmmakers need to approach it cautiously. To paraphrase Cherrie Moraga, our fusion with it is possible, but only if we make things get hot enough [12] only if we radicalize the Hollywood paradigm by infusing it with our ideas before it converts us to its ideology. Since "only with ideas can we confront ideology," [13] as Robin Wood says, then our screenwriting ideas had better be clearly formulated, our ideological goals explicit, and our cinematic plans well conceived. What follows, then, is an annotated inventory of strategies together with historical examples for screenwriters wishing to avoid repeating Hollywood's stupefying regressiveness.

Let me qualify what follows in two ways. The first recognizes the industry's contradictory treatment of scripts. On the one hand they are regarded as blueprints for the final film. But they are also routinely violated by studio executives, producers, directors and actors — for whom the script exists as nothing more than a highly malleable story outline. Although it's folly to believe that whatever's on the page will end up on the screen, screenwriters still must make that their working assumption, coupled with the hope that most of what they've labored over survives. Realistically, then, screenwriters should aim to control what they can and hope for the best

Second, these ideas are not non-negotiable scriptwriting demands. They are suggestions for mainstream screenwriters who are concerned about what sorts of messages their scripts are sending. My checklist is not an essentialist argument requiring filmmakers of color to devote themselves exclusively to stories about race and ethnicity. We may not always wish to write about the ethnic experience. Neal Jiménez' scripts for *RIVER'S EDGE* (1986) and *FOR THE BOYS* (1991), may not have dealt with Latinos, but his infiltration into the mainstream gave Latinos one more voice in the industry. Furthermore, it paved the way for his next film, *THE WATERDANCE* (1992, d. Neal Jiménez and Michael Steinberg, screenplay by Jiménez), which centers on issues of Otherness.

We should be able to write any kind of movie we want. Restricting ourselves solely to ethnic stories, we risk ghettoizing our talents, giving Hollywood an excuse to discard us once the "ethnic fad" has run its course. Furthermore, if we force ethnic/racial content into every story telling crevice, whether it belongs there or not, we run the risk of becoming doctrinaire, preaching to the converted and limiting our audience. There is a sense, however, in which every story is about race and ethnicity. Important decisions always need to be made about women, minor characters, minorities and Others regardless of the film's subject matter. This

checklist, then, is a sort of professional conscience, filmmaking notions to remind us what, in the long run, we're up to equal treatment for all and the tolerance of difference. The danger as I see it is that in the furious competition to enter the filmmaking mainstream we forget who we are and where we came from. If that happens, we lose touch with the very thing that makes us different from other screenwriters.

CHARACTERS

"I must be careful to avoid stereotypes in DO THE RIGHT THING...Only real characters, no types." — Spike Lee[14]

a) Protagonists

Make the protagonist an Other. The trick here is to avoid the temptation to make the protagonist-Other perfect and the Anglos cardboard villains. Doing to them what they've done to us for decades only validates a system that is the root problem. Since one sure way to break with stereotyping is to present heterogeneous groups, a better tack is to create a more complex world than the reductive good guys vs. bad. For example, in the Texas in THE BALLAD OF GREGORIO CORTEZ (1982, d. Robert M. Young) some Anglos are good, some bad and many somewhere in between. The same is true for SALT OF THE EARTH (1954, d. Herbert Biberman), ALAMBRISTA (1979, d. Robert M. Young), ZOOT SUIT, LA BAMBA and STAND AND DELIVER (1988, d. Ramon Menendez) and THE MILAGRO BEANFIELD WAR (d. Robert Redford).

Create a flawed Anglo protagonist who is a product of the system.

Instead of celebrating the American Dream, this gambit reveals the corrupting nature of a confused and conflicted dominant ideology. A prime example is Orson Welles' CITIZEN KANE (1941), whose protagonist, Charles Foster Kane, achieves fortune, power, prestige and influence, but loses his soul in the process. ("You know," he confesses in a moment of honest self-appraisal, "if I hadn't been very rich, I might have been a really great man.") Because audiences are used to identifying with the protagonist, such films make demanding movie watching. But handled properly, this could provide important ideological insights.

Two racist protagonists, Bick Benedict (Rock Hudson) in GIANT (1958, d. George Stevens) and Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) in THE SEARCHERS (1957, d. John Ford), are classic examples. Both characters are imbued with the "bigger-than-life" swagger audiences expect from Hollywood screen heroes. But given the motivational primacy racism has for each of them, it is impossible to overlook their prejudice. Viewers who are challenged by films like these that do not provide guilt-free protagonist identification may question the system. Then again, they might reject the protagonist and the film, so this ploy needs to be used judiciously. One way to make the subversive point and maintain audience engagement is to rely on star power, as both GIANT and THE SEARCHERS did, something usually outside a screenwriter's control. Write the character compellingly enough, though, and a star might want to play the part.

Create a plural protagonist. I am using the word "plural" to distinguish it from mass protagonists such as those in Eisenstein's films, which I don't think are viable in Hollywood. In the kind of film I'm thinking about, the function of the

protagonist is divided among several characters. Ideally these pluralistic co-protagonists would cut across class, race and ethnic lines. An exemplary case is Jean Renoir's *RULES OF THE GAME* (1939), a multiple character film without a single protagonist. The plural protagonist combined with Renoir's nonjudgmental world view creates a stirring anti-stereotyping film poetics.

In the U.S. vein, *THE MILAGRO BEANFIELD WAR* moved in this direction, even though Joe Mondragon was its central character. Nevertheless, the film captures a heterogeneous and complexly intertwined Mexican-American community. More successful was *SALT OF THE EARTH*'s community of striking workers — though strictly speaking, the film has dual protagonists. There exists an opening here because the sort of film I'm thinking of has not been made by a Latino yet. Anglo-directed examples include Robert Altman's *NASHVILLE* (1975) and John Sayles' *THE RETURN OF THE SECAUCUS SEVEN* (1980), *MATEWAN* (1988) and the masterful *CITY OF HOPE* (1991). Other well-known examples are Barry Levinson's *DINER* (1982) and Lawrence Kasdan's *THE BIG CHILL* (1983) and his curiously Latino-less vision of contemporary Los Angeles, *GRAND CANYON* (1991).

b) Antagonists

Make the system the antagonist. Because of their repeated defense of the system and their incessant drive toward the status-quo *ante* Happy Ending, most Hollywood films are inherently conservative. To counter this, have the protagonist struggle not against a threat to the system, but *against the corrupt system itself*. Notable precedents are *THE OX-BOW INCIDENT* (1943, d. William Wellman) and *HIGH NOON* (1952, d. Fred Zinnemann), two westerns that expose the myth that fairness and justice are innate American characteristics that automatically bubble to the surface of communities in crisis. Instead, these films depict U.S. democracy as an ideal that must be vigilantly struggled for if it is to exist at all. More recent examples include two films that highlight racial problems in metaphorical terms, *BLADE RUNNER* (1982, d. Ridley Scott) and *SPLASH* (1984, d. Ron Howard). In each film, the protagonist falls in love with an Other, rejects the system that ostracizes his beloved, and flees a defective social and ideological order with her.

A handful of recent Latino films have utilized this strategy impressively. The villain in *STAND AND DELIVER* (1987, d. Ramon Menendez) is a system that abandoned the *barrio* kids, created an Anglo-centric testing system to evaluate them, and is characteristically incredulous when they succeed. The same is true in *CROSSOVER DREAMS* (1985, d. Leon Ichaso), which makes the success myth itself the villain. Both *THE BALLAD OF GREGORIO CORTEZ* and *ZOOT SUIT* depict the dominant society as narrowminded and U.S. justice as a legal game played by Anglo rules.

One pitfall here is individualizing the problem. The critiques mounted by *THE CHINA SYNDROME* (1979, d. James Bridges) and *WALL STREET* (1987, d. Oliver Stone), for example, are undercut inasmuch as the villainy is too-conveniently isolated in immoral individuals (in *THE CHINA SYNDROME* an unscrupulous contractor, in *WALL STREET* a greedy financier) rather than in the cutthroat system that breeds them.

Eliminate the antagonist altogether. An inclusive cinema that places all people on equal footing and resists facile good/bad binarisms is a cinema where stereotypes will not flourish. Such a cinema possesses a vision large and

compassionate enough to see all of human nature — the goodness and the selfishness — without seeing villainy. Renoir's was such a cinema. "There's one thing, do you see, that's terrifying in this world," says the character of Octave (played by Renoir himself) in Renoir's *THE RULES OF THE GAME*, "and this is that every man [sic] has his reasons!" Renoir's cinematic outlook was knowing and accepting, penetrating but tolerant. Often disappointed by humankind, he never rejected it. A notable prime-time example is "Northern Exposure," which has managed to create, in the words of executive producer and writer Diane Frolov, "a nonjudgmental universe. There are no bad guys in Cicely [Alaska, the mythical town where the action takes place]. No one is consciously mean or hurtful." [15]

One possible weakness of this humanistic approach, though, is that problems like sexism and racism never appear, or that when they do they can be traced to "human nature" and not to ideology. This gets the system off the hook and blocks attempts to improve things — how can one ever correct human nature? But human attitudes can change, and we can provide examples of those transformations. A recent example of a character who undergoes such a conversion is the racist biker in *THE WATERDANCE*, played by William Forsythe, who overcomes his prejudice to befriend all his fellow paraplegics, regardless of race, ethnicity or nationality. Additionally, as discussed above, we can attack the belief system that helps form and support racist attitudes in people.

c) Heroines and "Love Interests"

Replace the male protagonist with a female protagonist/heroine who is an Other. The closest we've ever come to this is Rosaura Revueltas' Esperanza in *SALT OF THE EARTH*, an influential but non-mainstream film. The lack of Latina heroines in mainstream films and the brevity of this paragraph indicates how much work still needs to be done.

Make the "love interest" an Other. The hero/ protagonist may be male and Anglo, but if he is in love with a Chicana, that reveals a degree of open-mindedness and tolerance on his part (and hers). To a certain extent, audiences read Hollywood heroes as being good and doing good things; their choosing romantic partners of color is thus framed as model behavior.

We have already mentioned the romances between the Anglo heroes and Other women in *SPLASH* and *BLADE RUNNER*. Regarding Latinas specifically, there are the romances between the Anglo heroes and Mexican women in *ONE-EYED JACKS* (1960, d. Marion Brando), *THE BORDER* (1982, d. Tony Richardson), *GIANT*, *THE BUDDY HOLLY STORY* (1978, d. Steve Rash) and even Davy Crockett's and Jim Bowie's romantic involvements with Mexican women in the much-maligned *THE ALAMO* (1960, d. John Wayne). Other Chicana "love interests" include Gail Russell's social worker in Joseph Losey's *THE LAWLESS* (1950), who acts as a cultural tour guide for reporter Macdonald Carey, and Lab Rios' loyal girlfriend, played by Rita Moreno, in *THE RING* (1952, directed by Kurt Neumann), one of the rare films with Chicano and Chicana romantic leads.

Make the "love interest" a progressive foil to the hero's regressiveness. Again, the classic example is Esperanza in *SALT OF THE EARTH*, whose proto-feminism at first embarrasses and finally enlightens her supposedly liberal husband. In the process, *SALT* demonstrates how ethnic societies can replicate

dominant forms of oppression. A formidable mainstream example of an Anglo woman correcting her husband's wrong-headed ideology is Leslie (Elizabeth Taylor) in GIANT. A fortuitous side-effect is that GIANT also exposes the link between women's and Others' oppression within American patriarchy.

d) Minor characters

Resist the temptation to stereotype any minor character, regardless of race, class, gender or ethnicity. Because Hollywood narratives are consumed with the fate of their male heroes, minor characters become a sort of living landscape, a human backdrop for the protagonists' struggles. Due to this long-standing system of narrative economy, Hollywood sketches minor characters with broad strokes. This too quickly and easily lends itself to stereotyping, a dividing practice filmmakers of color must avoid on moral grounds.

But it ought to be avoided on purely creative grounds, too, because it is lazy, clichéd filmmaking. I'd argue that non-stereotypical characters don't take any more screen time to establish than types. They do, however, take more creativity (i.e., work) to write. Wherever possible, flesh out minor characters by acknowledging their individuality and respecting their intelligence. All of the characters in "Northern Exposure," for example, have unique pasts and are the reactive products of their particular class, ethnic, cultural, gender and racial histories. Their backgrounds do not stereotypically limit them, but rather open up their human potential.

Give minor and minority characters a social and economic context, as Richard Dyer has argued.[16] For example, the difference between youth films made from inside a minority culture (like ZOOT SUIT, STAND AND DELIVER, BOYS N THE HOOD [1991, d. John Singleton], and AMERICAN ME [1992, d. Edward James Olmos]) and those made from without (COLORS [1988, d. Dennis Hopper]) is that the "insider" films situate the youths *within their socioeconomic reality*. Locked out of any possibility for realizing mainstream success, these characters' anti-social behavior is an immoral yet understandable response to a system that has historically neglected them and ignored their needs.

Give minor and minority characters a cultural affiliation. The more information an audience has about a character, the less that character can be easily typed. Beyond personal traits, give characters cultural connections that supply them with a past and a relation to a culture. This can be conveyed with relatively small details. One of the best examples is Dr. Huxtable's jazz and soul record collection on "The Cosby Show." It added an interesting facet to his character, provided the rationale for the appearance of guest stars such as B.B. King and other black musicians on the show, and reminded viewers about one of Black America's most lasting contributions to American popular culture.

Deconstruct stereotypes with humor. Have minority characters self-consciously imitate, satirize or ridicule stereotypes and/or stereotypers. "You need to rechannel your hostility," Joel García (Eric Stoltz) tells a prejudiced paraplegic in THE WATERDANCE, comically deflating his attempt to "stand up" to the "spics and niggers" on the ward. The basic strategy here is to use humor to call attention to the difference between stereotypes and living people, undermining the whole apparatus of stereotyping in the process. A classic example is El Pachuco (Edward

James Olmos) in ZOOT SUIT, who continually monitors the difference between mainstream society's stereotypical ideas about zoot suiters and the boys' Chicano realities.

STORY ELEMENTS

"A major concern of story-telling should be restoring values, reversing the erosion of all those things that made a better life. One has to be prepared to dig down in the trenches and wage a long battle. The problem is that we have all been given a bad name by a few adventurers." — Charles Burnett[17]

a) Genre

Play with genre formulas. Most Hollywood films are genre stories, so genre revision is a basic tactic, and the one Latino cinema has utilized to great effect. THE BALLAD OF GREGORIO CORTEZ is an inverted Western; LA BAMBA is a Chicano BUDDY HOLLY STORY; CROSSOVER DREAMS, BREAK OF DAWN and THE MAMBO KINGS (1992, d. Arne Glimcher) are Latino backstage musicals; ZOOT SUIT is a genre hybrid, part musical, part courtroom drama; STAND AND DELIVER mixes the high school-teen flick and the go-for-it success story — TE QUEMO CON AMOR; AMERICAN ME is an updated Chicano reworking of THE BIG HOUSE and SCARFACE. The advantage of working within genres, of course, is that audiences are familiar with the narratives, yet expect variation; filmmakers are expected to play with genre formulas.

One caution: genre stories generally promote the system via the Happy Ending, a tendency we need to dampen.

In this we have some impressive precedents. CROSSOVER DREAMS, for example, redefined success and the happy ending by rejecting the standard Hollywood denouement. Its protagonist's failure in the exploitive music business is his salvation. Opting to return to his neighborhood, his friends, his music and his roots at film's end, he reaffirms the culture he had discarded, and reconnects with the very thing that made him and his band distinctive. He isn't a failure, the system is. Similarly, in STAND AND DELIVER, the ending is rousing not because Jaime Escalante (Edward James Olmos) and his students toppled an unfair system, but rather because they persevered and overcame a discriminatory system that remains in place.

Play with stock characters. Edward James Olmos' Lt. Castillo, the supervising detective in *Miami Vice*, is perhaps the best example of how revising a generic stock character provides an opportunity for countering stereotyping. I include this example for screenwriters because Olmos was granted so much control of his character that he in effect functioned as writer. To appreciate his innovations, remember that the police chief's narrative function in the police procedural is to pull in the reins on his renegade cop. Screaming and yelling, he tries to cajole his non-conformist detective hero into working within the law by threatening his Dirty Harry with suspension. Olmos' Lt. Castillo — terse, cool, collected, and rational — stands that genre convention on its head. He leads by example, getting the most out of his detectives by providing a model of hard work and diligence. As an example of how far Olmos was prepared to go to preserve the integrity of the character, he ignored producers' pleas for Castillo to appear in the series' action

scenes. "They wanted me to be in the shoot-'em-up bang-bangs," Olmos relates. "But I'd say, 'Castillo wouldn't be hero. [He'd] be back in the office.' It shocked them." [18] By inverting a standard genre character, Olmos replaced a tired narrative type with an ethnic character of daunting inner strength.

b) Point of View

Show the dominant culture through Other eyes. In ZOOT SUIT, BREAK OF DAWN and THE BALLAD OF GREGORIO CORTEZ we see the U.S. justice system from the Chicano perspective. But there is more that can be done. For example, ALAMBRISTA, EL NORTE and BORN IN EAST L.A. capture a working class/underclass reality few Americans ever see, either in lived experience or in the movies. STAND AND DELIVER gives audiences a different slant on academic "norms," and AMERICAN ME provides one of the most graphic depictions of prison life ever filmed.

Capture the mundane. As feminist criticism and film practice has demonstrated, the everyday is a rich vein of material. There is cultural poetry in the quotidian, as Chantal Akerman has shown in the lives of her women characters, Yasujiro Ozu revealed in his essaying of the Japanese family, Paul Strand, Fred Zinnemann and Emilio Gómez Muriel depicted in the daily lives of the Mexican fishermen in REDES / 1934), and Chicana filmmakers Sylvia Morales (CHICANA / 1979) and Lourdes Portillo (DESPUES DEL TERREMOTO / 1979) demonstrated in portraying their Latina subjects.

What Chantal Akerman says about women's gestures is just as true about Latinos — they are traditionally the lowest in the hierarchy of film images, and if we choose to show them with care and precision, it's because we love them and recognize that they have been denied and ignored. [19] Operating within the mundane, we affirm cultural moments that outsiders are ignorant of or dismiss out of hand. By treasuring rather than discarding these cultural "scraps," we reveal ourselves in rich and potentially non-stereotypical ways.

Because such moments are rare in Hollywood films, mainstream audiences aren't used to them and probably won't sit still for the kind of feature length studies of the everyday that Ozu and Akermann have made. But the prudent use of this technique could efficiently fill in character background or give a scene a deeper cultural dimension. In Wayne Wang's CHAN IS MISSING (1982), for example, leisurely conversations around kitchen tables contribute little to solving the central mystery, but add immeasurably to the film's thick cultural texture.

c) Locale and Setting

Set the action in a culturally distinctive and culturally specific location. One excellent way to promote our culture is to present some place or occasion that is seldom seen in mainstream cinema, or that Hollywood always gets wrong. Hollywood keeps delivering the "mean streets" of the barrio, but how often has a studio film taken us to a church hall dance or a *quinceañera*, or into a family kitchen to see how *buñuelos* are made? Here CHULAS FRONTERAS (1976, d. Les Blank) and Chicana films like AGUEDA MARTINEZ (d. Esperanza Vásquez, 1977) serve as exemplary models.

Reverse Hollywood's cultural insensitivity. Latin America need not always be portrayed as dirty and squalid. It can be clean — as most of it truly is — and exhibit its own charm and a human-centered sense of order, as in the opening sequences of *ALAMBRISTA* (which in turn makes the U.S. appear more ugly by comparison). It can be magically real, a place where the mythic exists on a daily basis, as in the beginning sequences of *EL NORTE*. Similarly, the border is more than a filthy haven for unsavory misfits. The most grotesque recent example is the El Paso seen in David Lynch's *WILD AT HEART* (1989), which reduced the border to a multicultural freak show. It can just as easily be depicted as a dynamic region inhabited by a creative and energetic people, a site where different cultures meet and mix, as in Jesús Salvador Treviño's *RAICES DE SANGRE* (1976), a film that gave its border inhabitants their humanistic due and provided them with political agency.

d) Time

Present a distinctive, Latino, sense of time. Our time sense is not inferior to the linear dominant, with its compulsive insistence on scheduling and punctuality — just different. Good examples of the depiction of Latino time exist in Chicana films such as *AGUEDA MARTINEZ* where Latinas are allowed their own life rhythms. They move at a pace that seems neither fast nor slow, but is perfectly suited to their lifestyles and endows them with a sense of dignity and self-worth.

Reclaim history and repopulate the past. As Frantz Fanon has said, "Use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope." [20] Basing movies on our history has been the most popular approach, as *THE BALLAD OF GREGORIO CORTEZ*, *BREAK OF DAWN*, *STAND AND DELIVER*, *ZOOT SUIT* and *LA BAMBA* demonstrate. But I'm suggesting a historical reclamation project that goes beyond the recounting of individual histories and entails a thorough recreation of the past.

To take just one example, the west probably looked closer to the way it was portrayed in *THE BALLAD OF GREGORIO CORTEZ*, with Mexicans, Tejanos and Anglos of various classes walking the same streets, than in almost any traditional western where Anglos fill frame after frame. More accurate demographics automatically revises Hollywood's standard history of the world. Accordingly, Martin Scorsese's dark-skinned Israel in *THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST* places Jesus within a wholly different cultural context, and the Black Egypt in Michael Jackson's video, "Remember the Time," is a miniature, Afrocentric revision of DeMille's *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS*.

e) Dialogue

Language divulges character and the relationship between character and culture. "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity," Gloria Anzaldúa has written. "I am my language." [21] Most Hollywood films not only deny this part of a Latino's identity, they adulterate it as well. In American culture and Hollywood films, the command of standard English establishes a person as well-educated, intelligent and credible. The use of "Hollywood Spanish" — broken English spoken with a heavy accent — marks a character as stupid. To counter this, have characters use their native tongue — in our case Spanish or *caló* — to link them to their cultural experience and to reveal important clues to their identity. The

GODFATHER films are excellent illustrations of this, particularly the scenes of young Vito in *Part II*, which are played entirely in Italian. In the script, write the dialogue in English but indicate that it is to be spoken in Spanish or *caló* and subtitled.

Language positions viewers. Typically, English-speaking audience members are privileged and non-English speakers marginalized by English dialogue. When characters speak another language, the tables are turned on English speakers, giving them a taste of what it feels like to be marginalized, on the fringes of discourse. This is especially true of the untranslated sequences of *ZOOT SUIT*, but it occurs even if subtitles are used, as in some passages in *AMERICAN ME*, because it shifts the film's address toward the ethnic group. Repositioning dominant viewers and placing them — even momentarily — at the margins forces them into a location from which they might begin to see the world differently. Moreover, when characters speak in their native tongue it makes the action more naturalistic and the relationships more intimate.

Language reveals cultural ties between characters. A beautiful scene in *ONE-EYED JACKS* between a Mexican mother (Katy Jurado) and her daughter (Pina Pellicer) takes place the morning after the daughter has spent the night with Brando's cowboy. Dramatically breaking with standard Hollywood practice, director Brando plays the delicate scene entirely in Spanish and without subtitles, and it is as remarkable for that as for its melodramatic restraint. Since the content of the scene is clear, even to non-Spanish speakers, the fact that it is played in Spanish adds an element of naturalism and closeness to what might have otherwise been a stale and hackneyed generation-gap confrontation scene.

CONCLUSION: BEATING THEM AT THEIR OWN GAME, OR ¡AY, GUIONISTA, NO TE RAJES!

A legitimate fear for screenwriters who alter the tried-and-true formula is that no one in Hollywood will want to produce their script. Respond to the charge that you are violating a sacred formula, that this is not the way "we make movies," with something Hollywood can understand: product differentiation, novelty as a time-honored marketing ploy. You bring something to Hollywood movies that nobody else can — promote this as an asset, not a liability. To support your point that difference is marketable, cite as many popular mainstream successes as best suits your bargaining situation: *LA BAMBA*, *DO THE RIGHT THING*, *BOYZ N THE HOOD*, *Northern Exposure*, *The Cosby Show*.

Finally, write about things that matter to you. Seek the form that most effectively realizes your vision, regardless of whether or not it adheres to a formula. As Anna Hamilton Phelan, the writer of *MASK* (1985, d. Peter Bogdanovich) and *GORILLAS IN THE MIST* (1988, d. Michael Apted) says,

"You just have to write from the heart, though many people and your friends and your family will tell you it's not commercial, but you just have to go ahead and write it if you want to write it. It has to come from your heart, because if you write it from your head or from your wallet... forget it." [22]

We need to make movies from our cultural hearts, using our cinematic eyes and

keeping our ideological heads. When we do, we will fill the screen with stories, sights and sounds never seen or heard before in mainstream cinema. But if we turn our backs on our culture, we reject our identity. And if that cultural identity doesn't speak through our stories and our characters — even those that are not obviously "ethnic" — we are no more than *vendidos*. Then we will have lost everything—our roots, our souls, our way, and our most important screenwriting tool, our insight into the human condition.

NOTES

1. "SEGUIN: The Same Side of the Alamo," in Gary Keller, ed., *Chicano Cinema: Research, Reviews, and Resources* (Binghamton, New York: Bilingual Review/Press, 1985), p. 151.
2. See Cine-Aztlán's "Ya Basta Con Yankee Imperialist Documentaries!" (1974) in Chon A. Noriega, ed. *Chicanos and Film: Essays on Chicano Representation and Resistance* (New York: Garland publishing, 1992), pp. 307-315; and Francisco X. Campos' "Toward the Development of a Raza Cinema (1975)," in the same anthology, pp. 317-336.
3. "Between a Weapon and a Formula," in Noriega, ed., p. 163.
4. "Inner City Blues," in Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, eds., *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989). p. 223.
5. Among the many screen writing texts, see for example, Alan A. Armer, *Writing the Screenplay* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, Inc., 1988); Irwin R. Blacker, *The Elements of Screenwriting* (New York: Collier Books, 1986); Ben Brady and Lanc, *The Understructure of Writing for Film & Television* (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1988); Stewart Bronfeld, *Writing for Film and Television* (New York: Touchstone, 1981); Edward Dmytryk, *On Screen Writing* (Boston: Focal Press, 1985); Syd Field, *The Screenwriter's Workbook* (New York: Dell, 1984) and *Selling a Screenplay: The Screenwriter's Guide to Hollywood* (New York: Dell, 1989); Michael Hauge, *Writing Screenplays That Sell* (New York: Harper, 1991); Viki King, *How to Write a Movie in 21 Days* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Robert Kosberg, *How to Sell Your Idea to Hollywood* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); Wells Root, *Writing the Script* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1979); Linda Seger, *Making a Good Script Great* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1987) and *Creating Unforgettable Characters* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1987); J. Michael Snczynski, *The Complete Book of Script Writing* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 1982); Dwight V. Swain and Joye R. Swain, *Film Scriptwriting: A Practical Manual*, Second Ed., (Boston: Focal Press, 1988); Eugene Vale, *The Technique of Screen and Television Writing* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1982); Richard Walter, *Screenwriting* (New York: Plume, 1988); Cynthia Whitcomb, *Selling Your Screenplay* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988); Jurgen Wolff and Kerry Cox, *Successful Script Writing* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 1988).

In addition there are a number of related works that bear on screenwriting. They include interviews of screenwriters, such as John Brady, *The Craft of the Screenwriter* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1981); William Froug, *The Screenwriter Looks at the Screenwriter* (New York: The Macmillan Company,

1972) and its sequel, *The New Screenwriter Looks at the New Screenwriter* (Los Angeles: Silrnan-James Press, 1991).

There are industry anthologies as well. In Roy Paul Madsen, *Working Cinema: Learning from the Masters* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1990), see "The Screenwriter," co-written with Norman Corwin (pp. 30-57); in Jason E. Squire, ed., *The Movie Business Book* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1983), see "The Writer-Director" by Joan Micklin Silver (pp. 38-43) and "The Screenwriter" by William Goldman (pp. 51-61). In addition, there is William Goldman's *Adventures in the Screen Trade* (New York: Warner Books, 1983) and John Sayles' *Thinking in Pictures* (Boston: Houghton Muffin Company, 1987).

Finally, Spike Lee's film journals that accompany his scripts are some of the few practical discussions of resisting the Hollywood paradigm by a person of color. See Lee, Spike Lee's *GOTTA HAVE IT: Inside Guerrilla Filmmaking* (New York: Fireside, 1987); Spike Lee with Lisa Jones, *Uplift the Race: the Construction of SCHOOL DAZE* (New York: Fireside, 1988), *DO THE RIGHT THING* (New York: Fireside, 1989), *MO' BETTER BLUES* (New York: Fireside, 1990).

6. See, for example, the *Journal of Film and Video* edition on screenwriting, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Summer 1984), which included articles such as "The Hollywood Market Place," "How to Pitch Ideas," and "The Matter of Screenplay Structure."

7. See especially the list of cinematic imperatives he lists on pp. 327 and 328.

8. (1978), in Patricia Erens, ed., *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). pp. 9-12.

9. See, for example, B. Ruby Rich, "In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism," in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods, Vol. II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 340-358; Annette Kuhn, "Textual Politics," in Erens, pp. 250-267; Robert Stam and Louise Spence, "Colonialism, Racism, and Representation: An Introduction," in the Nichols anthology, pp. 632-649; and Robin Wood, "Responsibilities of a Gay Film Critic," in the same collection, pp. 649-660.

In addition, a number of essays in Jim Pines and Paul Willemen's *Questions of Third Cinema* are extremely valuable. Besides Charles Burnett's piece already cited, see Teshome Gabriel's two articles, "Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films," pp. 30-52, and "Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory: Towards a Third Aesthetics," pp. 53-64; also Trinh T. Minh-ha's "Outside In Inside Out," *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

10. David Bordwell, "Story Causality and Motivation," in Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 16-17.

11. In Chon A. Noriega, ed., *Chicanos and Film*, pp. 245-268.

12. Cherrie Moraga, "The Welder," in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), pp. 219-220.

13. Wood, "Responsibilities of a Gay Film Critic," p. 654.

14. Spike Lee with Lisa Jones, *DO THE RIGHT THING*, p .45.
15. In Froug, *The New Screenwriter*, pp. 266-267.
16. See Dyer, Richard. "Stereotyping." In Richard Dyer (ed.), *Gays and Film*, pp. 27-39. New York: Zoetrope, 1984; and "Rejecting Straight Ideals: Gays in Film," in Peter Steven, (Ed.), *Jump Cut: Hollywood, Politics, and Counter Cinema*. (New York: Praeger, 1985), pp. 286-295.
17. "Inner City Blues," p. 224.
18. Quoted in Bettelou Peterson, "On *Vice* Olmos stayed off screen," *Austin American Statesman*, Show World section, May 24, 1992, p. 37.
19. See Akerman's original quote on the making of JEANNE DIELMAN in Teresa de Lauretis, "Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory," in Erens, pp. 292-293.
20. *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 232.
21. *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987). p. 59.
22. In Froug, *The New Screenwriter*, p. 31.

JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

U.S. film periodicals

by John Hess and Chuck Kleinhans

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 105-122

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Media Salad: With this issue we are starting Media Salad as a regular JUMP CUT feature. This section will cover resource pieces and overviews, such as the following article on U.S. film periodicals, as well as shorter reviews of books, videos, festivals, and other materials. As editors we're aware that we often learn about items such as occasional publications that would be of interest to many readers but which may not be known to them. We also see this section as a place for discussion of pragmatic and institutional issues in media analysis, such as copyright, teaching, and publication. Given the rapidly changing media scene, with new and changing technologies, Media Salad will occupy a space between a notes column and an extended review section. Publications, tapes, and other items for consideration should be sent to Chuck Kleinhans at Radio/Television/Film Department, Northwestern University, 1905 Sheridan Road, Evanston IL 60208.

The following article surveys the state of film criticism as represented by film periodicals in three parts. In the first we give a very brief overview of the history and place of film magazines in the United States and then discuss the current film culture situation. In the second part we discuss individually a selected number of the more important, representative, and/or popular film publications. In the final part we give basic information about these magazines and few others that are mentioned in the first part but which we do not discuss in detail in the second part. We have arranged the last two parts in alphabetical order. This overview can only be a snapshot of a changing scene. It was originally written for a special of *CineAction* (France) on film periodicals around the world, and it was based on research done in 1990-91. We invite additions and corrections and will add updates in future issues of JUMP CUT. We also plan updates on film periodicals in English from other countries and publications on cultural studies.

INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of film magazines published in the United States today are less than 20 years old. While a lively discussion of film took place before WW2, none of the critical magazines — often associated with the left in the 1930s — survived the War. A very few early magazines — all of them attached to the film industry in Hollywood — continue to publish today. The technical magazines, *SMPTE Journal*

(Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers, 1916) and *American Cinematographer* (1919), along with the business magazines, *Variety* (1905), *Box Office* (1920), *Hollywood Reporter* (1930), and *Film Journal* (1934) continue today.

While almost from its origins cinema has attracted the critical attention of intellectuals in the United States, critical writing on film for a long time tended to be occasional, often either the review or the article dealing with a topical issue, such as a case of censorship. This allowed individuals to develop a perspective, but either their writing was scattered over various publications or put into the regularity of a review column. Places for the sustained discussion of film as an art and social phenomenon which brought together diverse and specialist voices existed only sporadically before World War 2. The film magazine forms an essential institution for the critical analysis of cinema and the existence of a film culture that allows and encourages its development.

A new intellectual, cultural, and social discussion of cinema begins with the founding in 1945 of the *Hollywood Quarterly*, associated with the prestigious University of California at Los Angeles, one of the first schools to have a department of film, and the founding two years later of the University Film Association's journal. This latter organization was and remains a professional association primarily of film production teachers in universities. The most important film journalistic event in the 1950s and the real beginning of an intellectual film culture in the United States was the founding in 1955 of *Film Culture* by Jonas Mekas, recently arrived from his native Europe. It was the first postwar magazine to aggressively promote cinema as an art form and to become a transmission belt for European ideas about the cinema into the United States. This lively magazine originally validated cinema classics of the past, European art films, and important work in U.S. commercial cinema. After a few years, however, it became the house organ for the New American Cinema, originally a mix of the U.S. version of cinema verité and the burgeoning avant-garde or underground cinema. Maya Deren and Hans Richter wrote about their own work, Parker Tyler praised Cassavetes' *SHADOWS* and Richard Leacock explained his notion of an "Uncontrolled Cinema." *Film Culture's* place in the United States greatly resembles that of the 1950s *Cahiers du cinéma* in France. In fact, Andrew Sarris' early articles popularizing the "Auteur Theory" appeared in *Film Culture*. In the later 1960s and on into the 70s when it ceased publication, *Film Culture* became almost exclusively preoccupied with avant-garde experimentation.

The foundation of three new magazines in the 1960s continued this process of absorbing ideas on the cinema from Europe. *The Society for Cinematologists Journal* (1961, now called *Cinema Journal*), *Film Comment* (1962), *Cineaste* (1967), along with *Film Culture* each came out of very different milieux and developed quite separate sets of ideas which continue to mark serious writing about film in the United States. In fact, we could probably quite easily place most subsequent film critical magazines into the traditions founded by *Film Culture* (avant-garde, independent filmmaking), *The Society for Cinematologists Journal* (academic), *Film Comment* (conventional aesthetic approach to commercial film, after an earlier stage similar to *Film Culture*), and *Cineaste* (social, political approach). The fact that such a loose categorization so easily suggests itself points

to the narrowness and specialization of U.S. magazines in general and the kinds of artificial divisions which exist in funding, making, screening, teaching, and discussing cinema.

The 1970s saw a virtual explosion of new magazines about film and associated forms of mechanical and electronic reproduction of images (video, TV, photography, advertising, etc.), an expansion that has not abated — media magazines continue to arise like mushrooms after a heavy rain. And these magazines are increasingly specialized. Some of these magazines, of course, fall by the wayside — most unfortunately in the early 1970s the groundbreaking feminist publication *Women and Film* (1970-75).

While some charge that serious film criticism in the United States has become academicized and then dismiss it as an ivory tower pursuit (a frequent theme in *Cineaste*, for example), this simplification actually obscures the larger situation. We need to understand that for a significant number of intellectuals in the post-WW2 era, film became a significant area of concern. Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael quarreled in print, but both thought the movies an important concern of "public intellectuals" (those members of the intelligentsia who take up the task of affecting public opinion, taste, and social and political policy). Susan Sontag's famous essay on the "two cultures" (high culture and mass culture) was a high point in the early 60's marking (as did Pop Art as a movement) the ability of a new generation of intellectuals to embrace both high art and popular art at the same time, as opposed to an earlier generation's denunciation of commercial art (as in Dwight MacDonald's critique of "middlebrow" culture, and Clement Greenburg's essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"). For the generation of the 60s film was an important art form, one which gave them British realism, Bergman, the French New Wave, Fellini, Antonioni, Visconti, as well as access to Buñuel and the classics of the past. It also gave them, through the U.S. version of authorship and genre analysis, ways of understanding and appreciating the Hollywood films they grew up on and the new films and filmmakers which fascinated them, from BONNIE AND CLYDE to EASY RIDER, Peckinpah to Woody Allen.

This provided an abundant harvest to feed hungry growing minds and spirits, and it shaped a generation, the Baby Boomers, born in expanding affluence and raised with tv sets. Film could speak directly to the vital interests of young adults: love, ethics, politics, moral choice, how to live one's life. That many of those people who loved the movies passionately, and who cut their teeth on them, then went on to write about them and use criticism as a tool for their own understanding and development is hardly surprising, though it marks the first time in the United States that large numbers of people passionately became involved in the ongoing discussion of an aspect of mass culture (popular and folk forms had been discussed earlier, especially with folk music and jazz, but not always in the most commercial aspects). This was the (middle class, college-educated) demographic and social base for an expanding film culture. Such an environment, set in the period of the Vietnam War, the Black Power movement, the birth of a new feminist movement, and other signs of social and political upheaval sparked the optimism that fueled establishing new publications explicitly setting forth an agenda for criticism.

The Cold War and McCarthyism had silenced many intellectuals in the postwar era. Suddenly a new generation openly took up the idea of cultural and intellectual

work that was not divorced from politics and social change. *Cineaste* championed Third World Film and militant documentary, *Women & Film* began the feminist critique of media also then taken up by *Camera Obscura*, *Jump Cut* presented an openly marxist and feminist stance. As specialized publications, these magazines went beyond the *belles lettres* writing common to left-liberal criticism typified at that time by say, Stanley Kauffman, reviewer for *The New Republic*. They expected an audience knowledgeable about and even passionately committed to cinema, and they occupied an orbit much like the post-68 active political debate on film in France by *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Cinéthique*, and *Positif*. In England *Screen* actively promoted the Soviet 20s, Brecht, and Godard, along with Barthes, Metz, Lacan, and Althusser. An important film studies program for U.S. students in Paris increased the interest in semiotics, psychoanalysis, and poststructuralist thought as graduate students learned about new film theories first hand. And by the later 1970s, U.S. film culture was influenced by *Screen* and by similar publications such as *Framework* and *Afterimage* from the U.K., and *Cine-Tracts* from Canada.

But that generation got older, a movie star became President, reaction had the top hand, and for many of the Baby Boomers going to the movies now meant getting a baby sitter and driving to the mall. Seeing movies was mostly done on the small tv screen with video rentals and cable tv features. Film no longer had the same intensity as part of a process of discovery and maturation as it had before. Criticism changed as well. The Hollywood auteurs of the 1970s grew older without a new generation with Something Important To Say replacing their youthful spirit. (Indeed, much of the attention that Spike Lee gets seems to come from exactly the fact that he's about the only young director with a commercial track record who wants to make a significant statement.) And today, for the most part new talents and fascinated audiences cluster not at the big urban festivals like New York or Chicago, but at locally and regionally organized festivals of gay and lesbian, feminist, African American, Latino, Asian-Pacific American, and other "minority" interest. And most of the intense, active, and concerned discussion of film and video takes place in these settings today.

The ongoing merging of film with video and television in terms of production at times, but especially in distribution and exhibition, also changes the situation. The preposterous howls of outrage which greeted the re-release of films in "colorized" versions, particularly by Ted Turner on his cable network, were the cries of an older generation of purists. Few younger people saw any problem, especially when this gave them access to films they would otherwise never see. Similarly, the cable network American Movie Classics provides 24-hour a day reruns of Hollywood films without commercials, and various extra fee cable networks regularly carry releases only a few months after release. This and video rental allow for inexpensive repeated viewing of favorites. Clearly "movie going" means something very different in the 1990s than it did in the 1950s.

All of this has been fueled as well by changes in print journalism, the usual starting point for a body of criticism. The newspapers and general circulation magazines have declined in the United States while the special interest magazine has increased in significance. Entertainment and celebrities have become recognizable special subjects for print and broadcast journalism: thus the weekly *People* magazine, one of the highest circulation U.S. publications, features some human interest stories on unusual people, but concentrates its cover and most of its

editorial space on individuals and trends in the entertainment business. ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT is one of the most popular nightly prime time tv shows, giving "news" updates on show business and celebrities, new releases, etc. Most cable tv offers one of several 24-hour news and feature entertainment business channels. Newspaper critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert not only appear on Chicago news television with recommendations and mini-reviews (most urban tv stations have such features in their news shows), but have a highly successful nationally syndicated program in which they both appear and debate the merits of the week's new releases.

Film reviewing itself has changed. Most people now get information and evaluation of new films from tv, not from print. Thus the role of the print journalism reviewer who was a paid professional writer addressing a fairly clearly defined audience in an essayistic form which allowed for the development of argumentation and examples has changed. There are fewer of them and they have less influence, while the broadcast personality who can give a short snappy summary with a few action clips occupies central position. And those who have no problem with "blurb mongering" actually produce model ad copy snippets virtually on demand of the studio publicity departments.

The growth of film courses in colleges and universities in the 1960s and 70s had the net effect of making this popular undergraduate offering part of the formal college experience for many graduates. Thus there is presumably a larger number of people who could consume sophisticated film criticism. And the establishment of various partially government subsidized media art centers, often museum cinematheques, has provided a backup to the decline of art house theaters and college film societies as venues for less commercial films.

However, it is hard to find the same passion for film as an area of personal and intellectual concern today as 20-30 years ago. Manhattan still has a diverse and substantial film audience. And one can still find eager crowds of young people at opening screenings in Westwood (Los Angeles) but much of the energy comes from the hopes they have of breaking into the industry as writers, directors, actors, or other talent. For many young people film is part of their career interests in the communications and entertainment industries, one of the very few areas of the U.S. economy which is still growing and which nets a favorable balance of trade abroad.

The development of academic film studies encouraged increased publication of longer, more serious, and more analytic criticism. At its worst, this considerable body of work has all the marks of all academic writing: formulaic thinking, pedantry, and massive irrelevance. But as a newer and emerging area within higher education, film studies have by and large been intellectually significant and opened up new areas of consideration, particularly television and the analysis of mass culture. Having developed largely within literature departments, much of the work remains ignorant of the most elementary social science perspectives and issues, but this is gradually changing with a younger generation who accept analysis of institutions and reception as equally valid as close textual and aesthetic analysis. Equally important is the recent expansion of historical studies often carefully researched and argued and based on rediscovered films and archival research. This type of traditional scholarly activity lays the groundwork for important theoretical

and critical revision, while itself being guided by changes in thinking about the field that developed in recent criticism. For example, many historians now assume that it is important to investigate exhibition and audience reception as well as production and films as texts.

Film, as a canon-challenging area of studies in the 1960s and 70s university, tended to attract more liberal and adventurous students who maintained much of this perspective into the 1980s and 90s. Thus for the past few years the Society for Cinema Studies annual meeting has emphasized themes of minority perspectives and cinemas, gender politics, and third world film. Although it is easy to fault academics for not being political activists, film studies remains one of the most politically progressive areas of the U.S. university.

Against this backdrop, the critical "map" today looks something like this:

a. Intelligent and informed mass market critics in print and tv such as Siskel and Ebert who provide consumer reviews and address some aesthetic and social issues in film, often when provoked by ignorant and obnoxious critics in the same market. For example, denunciations of *DO THE RIGHT THING* by white critics who predicted it would cause race riots, or sexist men who thought *THELMA AND LOUISE* encouraged and celebrated violence against men. Some writers and intellectuals outside of film may join in these public discussions: for example, African American feminists Michelle Wallace and bell hooks (Gloria Watkins) have significant chapters on films in their recent anthologies.

b. Critics for the weekly urban hip tabloids such as the *Village Voice* (J. Hoberman, Georgia Brown) or *Chicago Reader* (Jonathan Rosenbaum) who have the time, space, and intelligent readership to give a detailed discussion to a film they consider important, to an issue they care about, or to express their own analysis or enthusiasm for a director or direction.

c. Critics for other weekly/monthly publications ranging from the weekend editions of major metropolitan newspapers where daily reviewers may have time for a "think piece" or readers of market niche (*New Yorker*) or attitude/ lifestyle (*Newsweek*, *Time*) or political sympathy (*The Nation*) may find an essayistic discussion of new releases. While close to group b above, we've separated the two because this category seems in definite decline: the recent retirement of Pauline Kael from the *New Yorker* perhaps marks the considerable impoverishment of this part of the critical terrain. It seldom generates a discussion that seems passionate or important.

d. Journalists and writers who write about film largely for the love of it. Publications like *Cinefantastique* and *Psychotronic* are filled with dilettante love of cinema written by buffs and enthusiasts who don't have a journalist's deadline or an academic's career to worry about

e. Academic writers who are expected to do research and write about film for free as part of their job as teachers, curators, archivists, etc.. Some of these people do fundamental scholarship such as archival historical research or interviews with filmmakers, some write critical essays or theoretical pieces.

Some additional points are worth making about the "critical terrain." In the United

States at present film studies has expanded to include television and video, and most of the people concerned with it intellectually also take up issues of mass culture. The term Cultural Studies is often invoked now to cover this broader range in the academic arena. It emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach often drawing on both social science and aesthetic methods. Thus, although we've listed only strictly film magazines and journals here, critical discussion of film also takes place in publications such as *Discourse*, *Cultural Studies*, *Cultural Critique*, *Representations*, *Genders*, *Artforum*, and so forth.

In addition, it needs to be noted that although the U.S. left in the past was almost obstinately blind to the area of culture other than politically militant work in a realist mode, most of the major left periodicals carry extensive cultural reviews. Elayne Rapping's analyses of popular culture in the recently defunct *Guardian* were especially fine, and Pat Aufderheide's coverage of Latin American and European cinema in *In These Times* sets a high standard. In addition left oriented publications varying from the activist-intellectual *Radical America* to *Socialist Review* and the more academic *Social Text* or the art-world-oriented *October* carry significant film articles from a progressive political perspective. Most gay and lesbian publications carry significant criticism, especially around controversial films such as *BASIC INSTINCT* or *PARIS IS BURNING*.

Finally, we must note here the importance in the United States of the technical and entertainment business press. From the very beginning technological change and innovation have played a major role in the development of cinema in the United States, affecting not just the technology, but the economics and aesthetics of Hollywood films, as well as that of documentary and independent filmmaking. One could, for example, refer to the development of soft focus photography after WW1, the coming of sound, the achievement of a practical deep-focus photography in the late 1930s, and wide screen and cinema verité in the 1950s. Informed critics should want to keep abreast of publications such as *American Cinematographer* and *Cinematographer*, which carry detailed articles on new techniques and processes in film production which are often premiered in new releases. *Cinefex* contains detailed discussions of special effects technology and processes.

Probably the best known film publication in the world is the business publication *Variety* — both the daily and the weekly versions. There are a great number of other entertainment business publications that concentrate on different aspects of the industry. They are invaluable sources of economic information and statistics about the latest trends. Back issues are important sources for those looking into the economic history of the industry. Though perhaps not central to the critical discussion of film, these magazines devoted nearly exclusively to technology and business are very important to filmmakers, critics and scholars. We also want to mention here the important periodical bibliography, *Film/Literature Index*.

The economic basis of these various publications is important to understand because in the last case economics is usually the most important factor in the history of and actual editorial production of film criticism. Publications such as *Premiere* are clear-cut capitalist enterprises: run for a profit, making most of their money from advertising. *Premiere* sells cigarettes, alcohol, and now perfume — issues really do smell thanks to scratch-and-sniff ads). They can afford to pay writers and staff professional wages, travel expenses to do interviews, and so forth.

Some publications such as *Cineaste* and *Film Quarterly* offer very modest payment to their writers, acknowledging their labor and sometimes recruiting from professional writers. At the other end are labors of love such as the fanzines.

Academic criticism falls in between. Professors are expected to write as part of their work, but not to get paid for it directly. Thus they tend to publish in nonprofit, often subsidized publications. For example, *Cinema Journal* is a benefit of membership in the Society for Cinema Studies, although non-members can subscribe. So all the members of SCS automatically get it. In contrast, *Screen* (U.K.) must compete in the U.S. market without an automatic base membership subsidy. While academic journals have traditionally charged more for institutional subscriptions to college and university libraries, they have also been secure in knowing that once carried, they would always be renewed by such libraries.

However the severe retrenchment in high education in the past few years has forced many libraries to actually cut back on subscriptions. The first to go tend to be the least-read and those less useful to undergraduates writing papers. As a result, faculty at such institutions must either carry their own personal subscription or visit a larger university library from time to time to catch up on publication in the field. Of course this slows down the topicality of research and the currentness of the exchange of ideas. So even with many more outlets for serious film writing today, the actual circulation of information and ideas may well be less. Relatively few academic periodicals are ever sold as individual copies in bookstores or newsstands. Thus relatively few potential readers will ever become aware of a new article in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* compared with the membership-based *Cinema Journal*. And both of those publications will never begin to touch the relatively large circulation of *Film Quarterly* or *Film Comment*, which have significant newsstand and bookstore sales.

The cost of individual subscriptions is also a factor in the diffusion of knowledge. Most people can't subscribe to every film periodical they might like to read and must pick and choose. But the cost of a sub is not always comparable. *Camera Obscura* with 6-10 articles per issue offers three issues for \$18.50, while *Screen* (U.K.) with about 4-6 articles per issue plus reports, debates, and book reviews, charges \$50.00 for four issues in the U.S.. *CineAction* (Canada) offers an individual sub in N. America for \$18 for 3 issues or \$30 for 6 issues, with about 10-12 articles per issue. *Film Quarterly* offers 4 issues for \$19.00 for individuals, while *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* charges \$63.00 for 4 issues. The British cultural studies journal *New Formations* sells for \$26.00 a single issue in the U.S. *Jump Cut* is an incredible bargain at \$14.00 for 4 issues with each issue running about 20 reviews and lengthy articles.

Finally, we must point out the extent to which the current deep recession in the United States coupled with the ongoing rightwing attack on almost all forms of culture have severely hindered the ability of U.S. intellectuals to both produce and discuss our culture. In the time that it has taken us to write this article, three noteworthy film magazines have ceased publication: (1) *American Film*, a general interest publication much like *Premiere*, (2) *Film History*, a scholarly journal, and (3) *International Documentary*, the only publication exclusively devoted to the documentary mode. And *Millimeter*, an important magazine covering technology and the film business, has not appeared in a long time and is believed to be

defunct. It seems very likely that they will not be the last.

Some cause for optimism might be found in the new world of "zines," inexpensively produced and self-distributed occasional publications filled with youthful angst and attitude, idiosyncratic and often anarchist views. While they usually don't deal with films per se, but swim within and against media culture, they offer a site for a new critical practice and bear watching for that alone.

ANNOTATED LIST OF SOME U. S. FILM MAGAZINES

Afterimage: *Afterimage*, published by the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York, is a tabloid covering independent film and video as well as photography and visual books. It is probably the best single source for information on new experimental films and videos as well as the festivals and institutions concerned with media arts. The publication ranges over the history of photography, computer images, new books and works, AIDS media, censorship controversies, and contains an ample listing of classifieds for events, solicitations for festivals and shows, etc. A good amount of attention is paid to feminist and gay/lesbian work and more recently youth culture and a more extended consideration of multiculturalism and minority critiques have appeared. While covering new thought particularly as it impacts upon the media art world, *Afterimage* often seems timid about offering a thorough critique or even a controversy of opinions on subjects it favors such as gay politics, feminist theory, and postmodern representation. Essential reading for the independent sector.

American Cinematographer: Covering the field of film production, *American Cinematographer* covers the craft and people who work in studios and on location, especially in feature dramatic film. Lots of ads for production equipment and rental houses and a certain amount of celebrating famous and not so famous directors of photography here (all-male world). The particular usefulness of the publication is its frequent detailed explanations of new production techniques and processes, particularly as they are found in newly released films. (for example, how they shot all that historical re-creation stuff for JFK).

American Cinemeditor: This publication is like *American Cinematographer* but for postproduction workers, especially film editors in Hollywood. Some interesting details of shooting special effects and computer composites on new films and some occasional career bios. Although many women have worked as film editors historically, the pictures of new members of the professional organization shows only men in the Summer '91 issue. Most curious: a photo of Oscar award winner William Reynolds (SOUND OF MUSIC, THE STING, THE GODFATHER), reveals a guy with a dinky 19" portable TV and a shelf of banal books. Not the glamour world often attributed to Hollywood pros. At the moment it seems that AC has ceased publication. The former editor and staff of AC have begun a new publication called *On Production*. American Cinema Editors seems prepared to begin another publication to represent the views its members. One can easily imagine that the drastic changes in postproduction technology in the last decade have led to this split in the ACE.

Asian Cinema: Reflecting the increasing interest in both East Asian and South Asian cinemas in the U.S., *Asian Cinema* is evolving into an academic journal from its beginnings as the newsletter of the Asian Cinema Studies Society. These early

newsletters were designed to help academics do research on Asian cinema by alerting them to future conferences, new books, and recent articles. They contained information about the scholarly activities of Society members and contributed to building the Society. The newsletter soon developed into a magazine in which the Society's members and others could publish short articles and substantive reports on a great variety of activities of interest to scholars. The magazine's approach is very broad as befits a new area of research. As was stated in the first newsletter, they "are especially interested in focusing attention on cinemas which are considered marginal in the West and have therefore received only limited scholarly attention." The semi-annual publication ranges from carefully researched articles on regional and little known cinemas (e.g., Carol Slingo on Malayan cinema), discussions of specific films and directors, interviews, and other critical work to conference and festival reports, an ongoing bibliography, announcements of events, newly available films and videos. Essential reading for anyone with a critical interest in Asian film.

Black Film Review: The *Black Film Review* began humbly in 1985 as a xeroxed newsletter under the editorship of David Nicholson. It soon picked up the support of many critics and filmmakers. By the end of the first year it had expanded to a 24-page magazine with an editorial board. The magazine has continued to grow in size, quality, and importance ever since. Nicholson stepped down in 1989 to return to creative writing, the magazine moved out of his house, and Jacquie Jones became the editor. The *Black Film Review* has become a very important forum for the discussion of African American independent film and, to a lesser extent, the discussion of African American participation and treatment in Hollywood film. Beyond this, however, the magazine has always had a more broadly multicultural approach. From the very beginning its editors and writers reached beyond the African American experience to see the commonalities in the experience of other disenfranchised people.

The magazine has always been open and pluralist in its approach and addressed the general reader rather than the specialist. The editors have dealt with several potentially antagonistic contradictions in very creative ways. David Nicholson announced in the very first issue his intent to deal primarily with the portrayals of African Americans in [Hollywood] film — how the characters function in the film and how realistic that is. In the very next issue a reader challenged this concentration on character (i.e. extra cinematic codes) and, quoting from Christine Gledhill, calls for a consideration of how films are actually constructed (i.e., cinematic codes).

In like fashion the magazine moved quickly to include women's voices and discussions of women's filmmaking. In the second year the magazine took up the debate around *THE COLOR PURPLE*, printing a number of differing opinions. This was soon followed by a number of articles on women filmmakers, an interest that has not abated. In fact, the first issue of 1990 has an excellent special section on African-American women filmmakers. This openness can also be seen in the magazine's willingness to deal positively with homosexuality in spite of the considerable resistance to such an approach in the African American community to this day. In the third issue of 1987 there is a special section on gay male film, centering around *LOOKING FOR LANGSTON*.

With its appeal to the general reader, *Black Film Review* tends to fall on the side of celebrating rather than thoroughly analyzing its chosen subject matter, and its format of short articles tends to leave weightier issues absent from discussion. Much more substantial and controversial discussions of issues and specific African American films have appeared in other publications. Even when a tough issue is taken on, as in Kalamu ya Salaam's essay on Black Macho in recent films, it is given only two and one-half pages of text with the promise of being continued in the next issue.

Box Office: *Box Office* is a major monthly magazine directed to the film industry. It includes lots of information about directors and their projects, actors and actresses and their careers, the concessions business, marketing and advertising. There is also specific entertainment data about films and videos. There are also short reviews of recent films as well. A special feature is their chart showing the release of feature films, organized by company.

Camera Obscura: Always intellectually rigorous, *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory* began in the mid-1970s with particular attention to the avant-garde countercinema (Godard, Duras, Rainer) and a semiotic-psychoanalytic critique of Hollywood with translations from Christian Metz, Raymond Bellour and Thierry Kuntzel. Over time the range of interests has expanded to encompass television, popular culture, and historical analysis. The writing tends to be academic and theoretical, but within that context is clear and well-written.

Recent issues, under the editorship of Janet Bergstrom, Elisabeth Lyon, Constance Penley, Lynn Spigel, and Sharon Willis, have provided a major assessment and re-evaluation of theoretical and practical studies of female spectatorship, studies of the representation of men and male hysteria, and historical studies of early cinema. While continuing to develop its core interests while adding new ones, CO has been extremely slow in considering work by women of color (other than the most experimental/rarified as with Trinh), or to consider the cinemas of Africa, Latin America, or Asia (except for a few pieces on China). Until fairly recently the publication exuded a relentless heterosexuality, studiously avoided considering lesbian perspectives or films, and it has never given much consideration to the history and current work of women documentarists or women working in the avant-garde. While these are faults shared with much of U.S. academic feminism, an editorial in issue 25-26 indicates a desire to open up the publication to more views and debate.

Cineaste: *Cineaste* began at New York University in 1967 as a magazine for students interested in producing film criticism. Early issues covered the activities at the few university film departments that existed then-especially NYU and UCLA. However, in the heat of the radical 1960s and especially the student movement building takeovers at Columbia University and the subsequent fight, the magazine quickly became radicalized. Soon the magazine set out the topics that it would continue to cover to this day-independent political U.S. and world cinema, third world film, and "progressive" Hollywood cinema. They also began interviewing filmmakers. When we founded JUMP CUT in 1974, immediately after leaving Indiana University, *Cineaste*, as well as *Women and Film*, were our models and inspiration.

Cineaste also played an important role in connecting the 1960s radicalism to past

radical filmmaking and cultural theory. For example, they published T.W. Adorno's views on the culture industry by printing a translation of an Adorno article that appeared in Germany in 1966. They also ran interviews with Leo Hurwitz about his involvement in the Film and Photo League and his own subsequent filmmaking. *Cineaste* editor Gary Crowdus worked with Tricontinental Films, the major distributor of Latin American and Third World films in the U.S. at the time and the magazine benefited with frequent articles and interviews on Third World cinema.

However, in the mid-1970s *Cineaste* backed away from the key issues in film culture at the time — film theory, feminism, and gay liberation. In fact, it might be possible to place the shift or retreat in the fourth issue of volume 4 in 1975. In that issue they interview Jane Fonda to find out to what extent she believed she could "implement her political beliefs in her film work within the industry." In the same issue Ruth McCormick reviews Christian Metz's *A Semiotics of the Cinema*. While she raises some very valid criticisms of Metz and cine-structuralism — its ahistoricism and its denial of conscious human political practice — she also sounds what will become *Cineaste*'s approach to film theory in the years to come: If the theorists cannot "make this kind of work accessible to large numbers of people," it will be "eventually relegated to the dustbin of history."

In this same issue, as well, *Cineaste* raised the issue of pornography from a libertarian perspective, warning against a "puritanism which could blind us to the free, creative and even healthy use of explicit sex in films with social value." In their approach to pornography here and in subsequent issues *Cineaste* placed itself outside the critiques of feminists, and gay male and lesbian activists. As Ronald Reagan entered the White House, *Cineaste*'s drift continued. Now they were interviewing Vincent Canby, the powerful *N.Y. Times* reviewer, and expressing fawning agreement with him and Andrew Sarris, a longstanding political and aesthetic conservative as well as publishing ignorant and *ad hominem* attacks on film theory and theorists by Raymond Durnat and Kevin Brownlow. Similarly, the publication has steadfastly ignored (though on occasion ignorantly attacked) the avant-garde movement.

Today *Cineaste* continues its original interest in politically inflected cinema and Third World film publishing important information not usually accessible elsewhere, for example on Arab cinema. The interviews remain a strong point, and sometimes include genuine surprises such a wonderful one with Dolly Parton revealing her to be a shrewd businesswoman. Occasionally opposing views on the same film brings issues into sharper relief, as with symposia on *THELMA AND LOUISE*, *DO THE RIGHT THING*, and *MALCOLM X*. The coverage of books, new independent releases and home video adds to the mix. *Cineaste* remains at its best when its writers lead from their strongest suits: Dan Georgakas providing an astute negative assessment of *DANCES WITH WOLVES* based on his longstanding interest in Native American history and Gary Crowdus offering skepticism on *ROGER AND ME* based on his autoworker family background. More perspectives by feminists, gays, and people of color have appeared in recent issues.

From the start *Cineaste* has set its style at the level of intelligent journalism making it clear and accessible, if sometimes rather bland. Its concentration on current cinema makes it always timely, but sometimes marks an ignorance of history. Its emphasis on commercial cinema is not matched by serious exploration of the

economic and institutional nature of production and diffusion of that sector. *Cineaste* often seems predictable in its politics and aesthetics: nothing too extreme in either category. One senses its writers are looking for a well-made feature dramatic film that they can enjoy while feeling good politically.

Cinefantastique: The most substantial general audience publication on science fiction, fantasy, and horror, *Cinefantastique* adopts a tone of avid seriousness in covering its terrain. Heavily illustrated, the magazine emphasizes new films and TV shows in feature articles and evaluative short reviews. Some historical articles appear, often in relation to a new remake or thematic continuation. Informative and well-written, the articles often feature behind the scenes views and interviews on special effects, cinematography, and scripting.

Cinema Journal: The publication of the Society for Cinema Studies, which has about 1000 members who teach in colleges and universities, primarily in literature and other humanities based departments, *Cinema Journal* is a major and prestigious outlet for academic scholarship and criticism in the U.S. In the 1960s and 70s, edited by Richard Dyer MacCann and later Jack C. Ellis, *Cinema Journal* almost exclusively featured historical research pieces. In part, this reflected a concern by the founders of academic film studies for recognition as a legitimate field in the university. (At that time serious writing by professors using an aesthetic/ critical approach was more likely to be found in *Film Quarterly* or *Film Comment*.)

The expansion of cinema studies in higher education and the subsequent growth of the membership brought about changes in the 1980s. Virginia Wright Wexman became editor and turned *Cinema Journal* into a traditionally run, blind refereed publication. Under this system a decision to accept or reject is based on a reading by two members of the society who do not know who wrote the article. The editor's job is largely secretarial since issues reflect the presumed best of the submissions and are not arranged by announced topic as is often the case with *Wide Angle*, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, and *Journal of Film and Video*. The effect was an immediate change in which critical and aesthetic based work appeared as well as articles using feminism, psychoanalysis, and semiotics. Work by junior faculty and graduate students appeared more frequently.

For a while *Cinema Journal* had a lively critical reply section in which writers responded to each other's work, however this feature disappeared under editor Dana Polan. Reflecting its membership's expertise, the publication tends to concentrate on Hollywood and west European dramatic narrative film, and more recently some U.S. television. Documentary and experimental work is sometimes considered. Social science methods remain foreign to its range of humanities based approaches. Close visual analysis is rare. A typical issue has three or four substantial articles and announcements of conferences, calls for papers, and listings of scholarly articles on film in non-film publications. A membership list and resources such as fellowship listings also appear occasionally.

Cinematograph: An occasional publication of the San Francisco Cinematheque which appears every two years or so, *Cinematograph* changes with the guest editor's focus but concentrates on the experimental side of the independent sector. Past issues have included interesting interviews with emerging filmmakers, substantial critical essays, and various documents about past and present films.

Writings by both artists and critics are included, and the works and makers covered often get beyond the old guard canon and New York centered perspectives of much U.S. writing on experimental film. *Cinematograph*, No. 4 took up the topic "Non-Fiction Film? Is There Such a Thing?" and brought together a stimulating mix of different perspectives.

East-West Film Journal: East-West Film Journal is a relatively new publication published by the East-West Center, a U.S. government project run out of the U.S. Information Agency, a branch of the State Department. Located in Hawaii, the Center functions as a study, training, and research site for politically conservative projects and individuals which fit into government policy. The film publication claims to offer a place where "filmmakers, critics, and scholars from East and West meet as partners in a common quest to gain cultural insights from cinema." Clearly questions of economic or cultural imperialism, the unequal power of the "partners," and the possibility that non-U.S. people might have different ideas are not on the agenda. The publication has recruited scholarly and critical articles from film studies figures such as Dudley Andrew, Nick Browne, Dana Polan, Bill Nichols, Patricia Mellencamp, Vivian Sobchak, and Paul Willemen. Just the sort of thing the ambassador or trade delegate can hand out to show the U.S. is interested in the Asian-Pacific area for more than military or economic reasons.

Film Comment: Gordon Hitchens founded *Film Comment* in 1962. At first he called it *Vision, A Journal of Film Comment*, but soon *Film Comment* became the name. During the 1960s under Hitchens' editorship the magazine was wild and eclectic, looking and sounding a lot like *Film Culture*. The magazine dealt with the avant-garde, featuring many articles by Gregory Markopoulos, documentary, animation and ethnographic films. It took strong political positions dealing with both the black list and with documentary films about the Vietnam War. It also covered many film festivals and tried to be very up-to-date about current trends in filmmaking.

Unfortunately, the magazine, also like *Film Culture*, had a great deal of difficulty raising enough money to continue publishing. Finally, in 1969 Hitchens was forced to

Thereafter the magazine became distinctly auteurist, concentrating primarily on the latest filmmaking in Europe, but also highlighting recent filmmaking in Eastern Europe, Latin American and Japan. In the early 1970s, influenced by the growing interest in European theories other than auteurism, the magazine published articles by Brian Henderson and Charles Eckert. But this flurry of excitement soon passed and the magazine returned to its auteurist approach. The focus on Hollywood in the past produced some memorable issues such as one devoted to Film Noir, but currently the policy is for a mix in each issue. Typical issues focus on new feature films of note, predominantly Hollywood but also some European art film, as well as genre studies, grouping a series together or retrospectively a director or screenwriter. There's always a sentimental look back at Hollywood such as an uncritical obituary on Frank Capra by current editor Richard T. Jameson. The publication's basic approach to cinema is conventional aesthetic appreciation with some gossip and such thrown in. Sarris still writes here occasionally, more turgid and sentimental now. Some younger critics offer a contrast, such as Jonathan Rosenbaum with forays into the Hollywood past or European cinemas. Its

extensive coverage of film festivals is of some interest as well as its highlighting of emerging commercial talents.

Film Criticism: *Film Criticism* is a little magazine which prints rather mediocre essays. The publication seems to have little direction or vision of where it is going or why. Occasionally an interesting or useful piece can be found in it, but it's hard to imagine why anyone would subscribe. One of those academic publications that can be examined every few years in some extra hours at the library to see if anything of interest made it in.

Film Journal: Directed at producers, distributors and theater owners, *Film Journal* is filled with trade news, covering the financial and commercial side of the industry. Along with the usual articles on marketing and advertising, the magazine also contains rather critical reviews of recent film releases. A special January supplement, called the Blue Sheets, gives detailed information on the up-coming studio releases planned for the year.

Film Quarterly: *Film Quarterly* began at the end of WW2 as the *Hollywood Quarterly*, concentrating on the social and cultural aspects of film and also of radio. In the 1940s various people, such as Abraham Polonsky and Sylvia Jarrico, who were blacklisted in the early 1950s, are associated with the magazine. These people disappear in the early 1950s and the journal changed its name to the *Quarterly Review of Film, Television, Radio*. An editorial explains that the editors wanted to distance themselves from the industry and become a nationally important journal. Under neither title does the journal ever mention, much less discuss, the witch-hunt against Hollywood leftists then going on. These first two incarnations were published by the University of California Press and housed on the UCLA campus. But in 1958 it dropped the interest in broadcasting and moved to Berkeley, taking its current name, *Film Quarterly*, concentrating thereafter on film criticism. Chick Callenbach, who has recently retired (succeeded by Ann Martin), became the journal's new editor in 1958. Ever since then, *Film Quarterly* has occupied a position between film criticism and film scholarship and between a progressive approach to film and society and a more narrow impressionistic and aesthetic approach.

Pushed to the left by the politics and activism of the 1960s and early 1970s, the magazine became an important early contributor to the developing radical film theory and criticism. It published important work on structuralism and semiology by Brian Henderson, Charles Eckert, and Bill Nichols. One inherent weakness in the magazine, however, and one that thwarted its development, was its near-total disregard of a feminist approach. As women became more and more central to the development of film theory and criticism, the magazine's editors retreated to a less politicized film criticism while continuing to publish useful and often important reviews of individual films and an always useful critical roundup of recent film books. The publication tended to avoid theory while, however, occasionally publishing truly weird pieces such as cranky attacks by Barry K. Salt on the work of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson.

Articles in *Film Quarterly* are usually written in a clear and convincing style with little of the jargon of poststructuralist discourse. Major critical analyses of recent U.S. and foreign features are the norm with some occasional attention to documentary and experimental scenes. Historical analysis and detailed analytic

pieces are rare.

Film Threat: This former fanzine specialty magazine, previously printed on newsprint and specializing in adolescent male fantasies and poses, has evolved into a glossier format and bills itself as "the other movie magazine." While sarcastically mocking the dominant cinema, from which its critics and the films they promote are excluded (but dying to get in on), the previous editorial direction concentrated on grossout and shock productions, sadism and ultraviolence, splatter films and punk media. The new editorial style, upgraded in layout as well, now imitates *Spy*, the au-attitude review of life seen from a heartless and overprivileged twenty-something perspective. The Nov. 1991 issue features major fluff such as the 50 emotionally coldest actors in Hollywood and a long set of articles on child stars (mostly how bad it is to be or have been one).

In terms of actually developing a critical perspective, the magazine fails, but it does have a definite *politique des auteurs* in long favorable piece on THE DARK BACKWARD, a sick comedy aimed at the cult market, directed for \$1.2 million by Adam Rifkin who dropped out of the University of Southern California film school after a year, wrote the script and spent five years trying to peddle it before getting his break. Film Threat editor Christian Gore claims, "Not since David Lynch's ERASERHEAD has a director created such a dark, depressing and mood-heavy movie...I'd rather see a bad Adam Rifkin film than a good Blake Edwards movie."

Films in Review: Sponsored by the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, *Films in Review* includes a great number of rather short film reviews in each issue along with several longer articles which usually highlight the work of lesser known professionals in the industry: Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Joel McCrea, Franz Waxman, John Turturro, Phyllis Thaxter. These latter articles usually include useful filmographies. There are also extensive obituaries and information about who is visiting or working in New York at the moment. Though clearly a film buffs magazine, it is filled with valuable information.

The Independent: *The Independent* began in the mid-1970s as a modest newsletter for members of the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF) in New York. Though still published by that organization, the newsletter, under the editorship of Martha Gever, blossomed into a very important magazine for and about independent film and video in the United States. It still performs its organizational function — providing support to producers — by printing lots of information, news, and opportunities. It is one of the best sources in the U.S. for information about the funding (or lack thereof), production, and distribution of independent work. It has been a partisan participant in the struggle for more funding from and more access to public television. And it has steadfastly defended film and video artists against government censorship. *The Independent* also prints substantial reports on film festivals around the world.

The magazine's feature articles have become increasingly important. Each issue has one to three feature articles. They include articles about or interviews with independent film and videomakers (e.g., Jon Jost and Trinh T. Minh-ha), articles about important film festivals (e.g., Berlin, Oberhausen, Leipzig, and FESPACO). On the other hand, information about and coverage of local and regional work is pretty skimpy. While its institutional analysis is outstanding, when it comes to actual criticism and analysis of specific works, *The Independent* does not print

such material. Given that it is finally accountable to its membership, it would be too difficult and divisive to actually provide evaluative and analytic commentary on the work made by members of the organization. Thus what appears on specific films tends to be about the production process or the filmmaker's own reflections on their work. At their best these are informative; at their worst they are puff pieces.

The Journal of Film and Video: *The Journal of Film and Video* is the official journal of the University Film and Video Association. It was founded shortly after WW2 by the earliest film (mostly production) teachers in the USA. Many of the founders had learned film production in the military during the war. Unlike the more academic Society for Cinema Studies, UFVA has always stressed, but by no means exclusively, film production, the film industry and also sociological approaches to film. Under editor Patricia Erens in the 1980s, the publication was substantially upgraded in intellectual rigor and featured thematic issues often on unusual topics such as amateur and home movie making. Issues of pedagogy and course plans are a useful staple of the journal. It continues to publish the College Course File series begun years ago by the American Film Institute. A Course File is an annotated outline for a university course on a given subject. This series is very useful to all university teachers, but especially to newcomers, because it gives a good sense of what people are doing and what can be done. Articles on screenwriting and production process find their home here along with academic studies representing the current range of interests of the members. Recent editor Michael Selig organized both general issues and thematic ones.

The Journal of Popular Film and Television: *The Journal of Popular Film and Television* was founded as the *Journal of Popular Film* in 1972 as a spin-off from the *Journal of Popular Culture*. It was then and remains today a publication of the Popular Culture Center at Bowling Green University in Ohio. The Center and its journals were the product of and the organizing center of a large and broad movement in U.S. academic life to take all forms of popular culture seriously. They founded a national and regional organizations with annual meetings. Because no subject was beneath their interest and concern, their meetings were lively and interesting. The main strength of this movement was the way in which people meticulously gathered great amounts of data about their subjects. Thus their back issues are filled with a wealth of interesting and often hard to get information about a great range of subjects having to do with popular culture and the media. Its weakness has always been that their ignorance of or opposition to any form of theory left them nearly helpless in the face of the facts and material evidence they had gathered.

In the early issues of the journal can be found important early work on genre films by academics such as Stuart Kaminsky and Jack Nachbar. Most of the early contributors are men and the journal seemed unaffected by the many theoretical currents that became important in the mid-1970s, including feminism or the culture of Third World people here and abroad. In 1979 the journal changed its name to indicate their interest in television and in the 1980s some of the theoretical concerns of the 1970s began to find their way into the journal. Recent issues have dealt with feminist views of sexuality, the commodification of perception and psychoanalysis and cinema.

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JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

U.S. film periodicals

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from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 105-122

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Jump Cut: Since 1974, *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, has combined a political activist orientation with a range of writing styles from the evaluative journalistic review to the more "objective" academic article. Among U.S. publications with an open progressive politics, it is often more academic than *Cineaste*, but often more journalistic than *Camera Obscura*. With an editorial position from the start openly committed to Marxism and feminism, the publication has declared its concern to develop an analysis that recognizes the interrelationship of class, race, and gender. In addition to reviews of new films (always some Hollywood, but also art house features, documentary, and experimental) the publication regularly features special sections on issues such as gay film, lesbian criticism, new theory, Latin American cinema, African and African diaspora work, sexual representation, China, Cuba, and ideological critiques of the mainstream.

Jump Cut has gone through various transformations: once a newsprint tabloid appearing 6 times a year, it is now a book length magazine format annual and moving away from a period of staff collectivity, it is now co-edited by its founders, John Hess, Chuck Kleinhans, and Julia Lesage. Always outspoken about the issues which concern it, the publication has been at the center of some critical controversies. Critics complain of its self-righteous editorial tone, while supporters admire its willingness to frankly state its political agenda in an intellectual climate where many declare an "interest" in Marxism, multiculturalism, feminist or gay issues but won't come out and accept the label. Although most of its writers are academics, the publication maintains a high degree of readability.

Lightstruck: A somewhat erratic publication that evolved out of a newsletter, *Lightstruck* provides information and critical articles from the Experimental Film Coalition. In addition to regular news, reports from regions about screenings, announcements of new work completed, and a regular tech column, the magazine covers larger critical and aesthetic questions in interviews, statements by filmmakers, and occasional critical essays. While some controversy emerges from time to time (e.g., is there a place for documentary or dramatic narrative in the avant-garde?), the general tone reflects traditional individual artist Romantic aesthetics typical of the New American Cinema movement of the 1960s. Video is regarded with great suspicion, if not hostility. Politically or ethically committed work seems intelligible here only if strongly related to the maker's individual consciousness. Relations with adjoining arts such as music, performance, and video appear very marginal, and there's little sense of engagement with the issues

that have so engaged the art world in the late 1980s and early 90s: AIDS, censorship, the Gulf War and other imperial extensions, gay and lesbian issues, race and ethnic difference and discrimination, sexuality and gender issues, funding cuts and so forth.

Millennium Film Journal: Published by Millennium, the New York City avant-garde film showcase and production facility, the publication takes experimental film as its central concern, most notably in critical essays on recent work. In the early 1980s *MFJ* was somewhat unfairly characterized as presenting graduate student term papers from the New York University Cinema Studies Department orthodoxy. However the publication also included discussions of European and Latin American film, some feminist, political, and historical analysis, and an interest in more theoretical concerns, reflecting the range of one of its principal co-editors, Noel Carroll. Issue 16/17/18 presented a notable 20 year retrospective on Millennium and the avant-garde scene with an excellent analysis by Paul Arthur and interesting views by Fred Camper and Annette Michelson. More recently, edited by Tony Pipolo and Grahame Weinbren, it has turned to the unfortunate weaknesses of avant-garde criticism: puff pieces for filmmakers with a "script issue" and uncritical interviews with well-established figures. Predictably, *Millennium Film Journal* reflects the New York City parochialism of its parent showcase, and pays little attention to the rest of the country or to adjacent areas such as video and performance art. Given the general concern in the U.S. art world with issues of sexuality, gender politics, multiculturalism, and state censorship since the mid-80s, *MFJ*, dependent on National Endowment for the Arts funding, seems incredibly conservative in its resolute silence on such matters. With the demise of the more adventurous *Motion Picture*, from the now defunct Collective for Living Cinema, one must look to *Afterimage* and *Cinematograph* for lively coverage of the experimental scene.

Movieline: Another recent bid in the film fluff journalism market (compare *Film Threat*), the March 1992 issue of *Movieline* offers a survey of Young Hollywood including the stars favorite drugs and how they get them, a puff piece on back-from-drugs Drew Barrymore, and what-we-always-suspected in an article by Stephan Farber: "The studios are hiring more first-time directors than ever before. A movie revolution? Hardly. These kids work cheap and are easier to keep in line." An interesting take on the glamour and glitz as seen by people who are also aware of the downside and economic underbelly of the monster.

Off Hollywood Report: Formerly *Montage*, a publication of the Independent Feature Project, an organization aiding people interested in making dramatic films outside of the traditional studio system, the publication has news and notes, and information on legal and financial aspects of the business (such as how to option films, working with limited partnerships, etc.), coverage of emerging directors, screenwriters, and works in planning or production. The whole world of auteur cinema wannabees, the latest on the aspiring crowd, is present. Indispensable for those who are trying to track new directorial talent in the world of dramatic features, and revealing on the complexities of today's market.

Persistence of Vision: This annual academic journal is published by the film faculty of the City University of New York. The issues are usually organized around specific issues, such as New German Cinema, U.S. film in the 1970s, Genre, and early

cinema. Though there are no editorials setting out the magazines policies or desired direction, the writers tend to see things in some sort of social or film historical context — Wells and the industry or historical consciousness in Dryer's work.

Post Script: An academic journal subtitled "Essays in Film and the Humanities," *Post Script* presents a very eclectic mix of articles with no apparent direction. It is neither very theoretical nor very political. It includes some interviews with independent filmmakers and industry craftspeople. The journal does publish a quite extensive and thus valuable Annual Bibliography.

Premiere: *Premiere: The Movie Magazine*, a Hollywood-centered glossy, has smiling stars on its cover and lots of puff piece features on the inside promoting forthcoming films in every imaginable way: on the set interviews, star bios, special effects features, screenwriter and producer features and featurettes. Snappy visuals and prose are its strongest features, but it's difficult to figure out precisely what readership the editors imagine when they have to caption a photo of Alfred Hitchcock and David O. Selznick to identify which one is Hitch. Again and again the magazine directly addresses or returns to questions of movies as a business. But instead of the hard facts of *Hollywood Reporter* or *Variety*, *Premiere* seems oriented to armchair wannabees. The information isn't current or solid enough to be useful for making investment decisions or career moves. *Premiere* seems like the consummate movie magazine of the Reagan-Bush era following high rolling entertainment business decisions and charting whose career is going up or down as spectator sport.

Psychotronic Video: In sharp contrast to the sour-grapes wannabees at *Film Threat*, the *Psychotronic* crew is totally and passionately committed to films on the margins, particularly horror, gore, and exploitation. In their devotion they scrupulously assemble the bits and pieces of history and criticism. Extended filmographies and interviews are particularly strong, and equally obsessed readers send in endless corrections and additions with an attention to detail and accuracy seldom seen in academic film study. The near obsession extends to detailed interviews with and articles on B film figures such as actors David Carradine, James Coburn, and Peter Fonda, and director Robert Wise, as well as topics such as horror in Spain, odd sci-fi, old roadshow films from the 1940s, extended coverage of local and special interest fanzines, and assorted news and gossip. Every issue also includes reviews of related books and records, descriptive reviews of re-releases on video and lots of ads for small specialty video distributors.

Editor Michael Weldon, author of *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* (NY: Ballantine, 1983), combines the right mix of nerdy attention to detail, wide ranging lowbrow taste, and a sense of proportion and humor to make *Psychotronic Video* readable and useful. The basic editorial attitude to the films and careers is respectful. The offbeat energy and gleams of originality in the less-than-banal films covered justifies the enterprise and calls for an enthusiastic and non-cynical response.

Quarterly Review of Film and Video: Begun in the late 1970s as *The Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, the publication announced its intention of being an active review journal, paying particular attention to the critical examination of scholarship and criticism in the field. That goal changed and the publication

quickly evolved into a usually thematically organized quarterly that seemed filled with typical to excellent conference papers on U.S. and Western European cinema. Owned by a commercial publisher who gradually went under in the mid-80s, the publication reemerged under the ownership of Harwood Academic, a Swiss firm. Announcing a new look and wider set of concerns while finishing off a backlog of issues, the late Katherine S. Kovacs became editor in 1989. Again thematic issues, often guest-edited, seemed the norm, though the overall intellectual quality increased. A wider range of interests, including TV and video and a broader conception of international studies seems indicated as well under new editor Michael Renov. Forthcoming issues include television studies, "questioning the national," gay and lesbian representations, and Black feminism and media.

Sightlines: *Sightlines* is the publication of the American Film and Video Association (AFVA) and is the most important source of information about educational film and video in the U.S. It is very important to schools, libraries, archives, and other institutions that buy and collect films and videos, especially because each issue includes a list of new releases on film, video, and laser disc of every imaginable type of work — from old Hollywood movies to short educational documentaries. The magazine contains important information about distribution, including the names and addresses of the distributors of all the media mentioned in each issue. It continuously updates its readers about new exhibition equipment and technologies. For example, the fall, 1990, issue contains two articles on laser discs, explaining a brief history of the technology, how it has been used, how to take care of it, and how to talk about it (a glossary of terms for talking about interactive multimedia).

Spectator: *Spectator* is a student published journal from the School of Cinema-Television at the University of Southern California. It features reworked student research and critical essays, many interesting and intelligent, though often heavily indebted to critical jargon. The subject range is quite wide, and some articles appear with a definite political orientation, particularly feminist analyses.

The Velvet Light Trap: In the 1970s *The Velvet Light Trap* was one of the more important U.S. film magazines. It was brought out by the "film community of Madison," Wisconsin, that is current and former students of film at the main campus of the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The campus had become the repository for the papers of several Hollywood studios and the film students had access to these records. The magazine was prominent for its interest in and analysis of Hollywood studio productions, often from an historical perspective. Special issues dealt with the actor, RKO studio, the western, the 1950s, and history films. Only very occasionally did they deal with foreign films (an issue on French Cinema) or newer Hollywood films. The magazine became more and more infrequent and finally ceased publication altogether in the mid-1980s only to be reborn again recently in a shared editorship with students at the University of Texas, another premiere archive for film history studies.

Though often providing interesting and hard to find information about the Hollywood production process and the studios, the magazine also expressed a nearly film buff approach, eschewing almost entirely the various theories and debates about film that so dominated film studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. There is little evidence in the magazine of an awareness of anything else going on

outside the confines of the library and screening room. Nonetheless, more recent issues have begun to include feminist, gay male and lesbian perspectives. The magazine is now a valuable source of information on critical views of Hollywood studio filmmaking and is open to considering more offbeat topics such as exploitation films.

Visions: A quarterly magazine about film, video, and performance arts, published by the Boston Film! Video Foundation, typifies a new development in media publication: the regional newsletter/magazine. Various media art centers around the U.S., typically supported by a combination of National Endowment for the Arts money, state and regional grants, and donations from private foundations, business and individual donors, help support the production and/or diffusion of independent creative work. Some offer equipment, facilities, and services, while others provide distribution and exhibition, and some do both. Newsletters provide a useful vehicle for keeping in touch with a diverse and fluid membership and constituency, and the advent of widespread computer based "desktop publishing" has lowered publishing production costs while usually improving the presentational quality of the newssheets. Typical is *Release Print* from the Film Arts Foundation in the San Francisco Bay area. Some of these local/regional based efforts evolve into full fledged magazines with enough substance to be valuable as national publications, such as *IMAGENews* from Atlanta's Image Film/ Video Center.

Visions, recently begun by New England's largest media arts center, offers the standard news and networking info, and a good deal more. Festival reports in the Fall 1991 issue included Gerald Peary on Troia (Portugal) and Elrieda Abbe on Chicago's Women in the Director's Chair. A review of Marlon Riggs' new tape on Blacks in prime time TV, *COLOR ADJUSTMENT*, appears as well as an interview with Juliet Bashore on *KAMIKAZE HEARTS*, her docufiction film on lesbians in the het porn film business. The cover story and interview highlighted a local success, *GANG PEACE*, a video made by young African Americans who learned their craft as part of BFI's training program.

Wide Angle: *Wide Angle* is a publication of the Ohio University Film Department and has over the years published important work by many of the leading U.S. film scholars. In fact, in reviewing back issues, one finds many articles which subsequently became the basis for books. Yet the material is usually so narrowly conceived and isolated from any historical moment and/or social practice that the articles often seem more precious and esoteric than they actually are. The magazine tends to focus each issue on a single topic and these cover a very wide range — Godard, Film History, the 1920s, Feminism, Bazin, Television, etc. It is a good indicator of what university-based film studies teachers and scholars are thinking. However, like many academic magazines, *Wide Angle* exhibits little continuity or editorial direction. Instead, it seems more like an anthology of the year's scholarly writing on film. This sense of drift has intensified since Peter Lehman, a co-founder, stepped down in 1985. Since then there have been a series of young editor-scholars who the university hires to teach, edit the magazine, and run their annual conference. They usually burn out in a few years from this workload and move on. Thus no editor ever gets the opportunity to give a sense of direction to the magazine.

PUBLICATION DATA

Adam Film World Guide, 8060 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90046. 213/653 8060. Lists distributors, producers, and other companies involved in heterosexual adult videos as well as reviews of several hundred recent tapes. \$6.95 each.

Afterimage, ed. Grant H. Kester and Nadine L. McCann. Visual Studies Workshop. 31 Prince Street, Rochester, NY 14607. 716/442-8676. ISSN 0300-7472. Began 1973. Membership: \$30, inst \$40/ foreign: \$35, instit \$45. 20 pg. tabloid.

AFVA Bulletin, ed. Casey Ashe. 920 Barnsdale Road, Suite 152, LaGrange Park, IL 60525. 708/482-4000. Pub. of American Film & Video Association., concentrates on educational market.

American Cinematographer, ed. George Turner. Circ. 30,000. Box 2230, Los Angeles, CA 90028. 213/876-5080/fax: 213/ 876-4973. ISSN 0002-7928. Began 1919. Monthly, \$24/Can&Mex: \$39/Foreign: \$49. Technical magazine.

American Cinemeditor. Cite. 9,500. P.O. Box 16490, Encino, CA 91416-6490. 818/9076682. Publication of Cinema Editors (ACE). ISSN 0044-7625. It has ceased publication, followed by *On Production*, a new mag. Began 1950. Technical.

American Classic Screen, ed. John C. Tibbetts. Cite. 20,000. Box 7150, Shawnee Mission, KS 66207. 913/341-1919. ISSN 0195-8267. Began 1977. bi-monthly \$15.

American Film, ed. Wolf Schneider. Circ.135,000. 6671 Sunset Blvd. #1514, Hollywood, CA 90028. 213/856-5350. ISSN 0361-4757. Defunct, began 1975 by the American Film Institute, then turned over to private ownership. Even with this headstart, these capitalists couldn't make it ago.

American Premiere, ed. Susan Royal. Cite. 17,500. 8421 Wilshire Blvd., Penthouse Ste., Beverly Hills, CA 90211. ISSN 0279-0041. Formerly *Premiere*. Began 1979. Monthly \$16.

Animation Magazine, ed. Terry Thoren. Cite. 25,000. P.O. Box 25547, Los Angeles, CA 90025. Covers technical aspects of computer animation, commercials, video and features. Began 1987. Quarterly \$15.

Animator, ed. Kathy Clark. Circ. 2,000. 1219 S. W. Park Ave., Portland, OR 97205. 503/ 2211156. Pub by Oregon Art Institute and Northwest Film & Video Center. ISSN 0889-5589. Information, interviews and resources for film and video makers and for public relations firms. Newsletter. Began 1971. q \$6/\$ 10.

Art and Cinema, ed. Daryl Chin. Circ. 5,000. P.O. Box 1208, Imperial Beach, CA 92032.

Asian Cinema, ed. Mira Reym Binford. Quinnipiac College, Box 91. Hamden, CT 06518-0569. Publication of Asian Cinema Society. Began 1985. 2 issues/yr membership or \$12/Inst \$20. 36 pg.

Back Stage, ed. Richard Miller. Cite. 31,000. 330 W. 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017. 212/947-0020/Fax: 212/967-6786. Began 1960. weekly \$45.

Back Stage Film-Tape Syndication. Circ. 7,000. 330 W. 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017. 212/947-0020/Fax: 212/967-6786. Lists producers and services of non-theatrical and industrial films and videos. Began 1965. annual \$35

Big Reel, ed. Donald R. Key. Circ. 4000. Rte. 3, Box 83, Madison NC 27025. 919/427-5850. Forum for film buffs to buy, trade and sell films, photos, tapes, pubs, posters, projectors. Began 1973. monthly \$20.

Black Film Review, ed. Jacquie Jones. Cite. 1.000. 2025 Eye Street NW, #213, Washington, DC 20006. 202/466-2753. ISSN 08875723. Began 1985. quarterly \$12, inst \$24/ foreign: \$22, inst /\$34.34 pg.

Bondage, ed. Richard Schenkman. Cite. 6,000. P.O. Box 414, Bronxville NY 10708. James Bond 007 Fan Club. Began 1973. annual \$16.

Bondage Quarterly, PO Box 414, Bronxville NY 10708-0414. James Bond 007 Fan Club. Began 1973. Quarterly/membership.

Box Office, ed. Harley W. Lond. Circ. 10,000. 6640 Sunset Blvd, #100, Hollywood CA 90028. 213/465-1186/fax: 213/4655049. ISSN 0006-8527. The business magazine of the motion picture industry. Began 1920. m \$35/Can&Mex \$45/other \$60.

Camera Obscura, eds. Janet Bergstrom. Elisabeth Lyon. Constance Penley, Lynn Spigel, Sharon Willis. Circ. 3,000. P.O. Box 25899, Los Angeles CA 900025. Johns Hopkins U Press. ISSN 0270-5346. Presents current perspectives on the national and int'l film scene. Began 1976. 3 yr \$18, Inst: \$351 foreign — \$25, inst \$42.50. 200 pg.

Castle Dracula, ed. Gordon R. Guy. P.O. Box 423, Glastonbury, East Hartford CT 06033. Dedicated to the appreciation, promotion & preservation of supernatural fiction in lit, films, theater, TV. Began 1967. q \$7.

Cineaste, ed. Gary Crowdus. Circ. 7,000. 200 Park Ave. So., New York NY 10003. 212/982-1241. ISSN 0009-7004. Began 1967. q. \$13, Inst \$21/foreign: \$19, inst \$25. Mpg.

Cinefan, ed. Randall D. Larson. Circ. 1,000. P.O. Box 70868, Sunnyvale CA 94086. 408/ 226-9339. ISSN 0277-5891. Presents interviews, retros on sci-fi, fantasy and horror films with emphasis on foreign, independents, obscure. Began 1974. 3/yr \$7.

Cinefantastique, ed. Frederick S. Clarke. Circ. 20,000. P.O. Box 270. Oak Park IL 60303. 708(366-5566. ISSN 0145-6032. Began 1970. 6/yr \$18/foreign: \$21. 62 pg.

Cinefex, ed. Don Shay. Circ. 15,000. P.O. Box 20027, Riverside CA 92516. Technical, about effects. Began 1980. q \$22. 58 pg.

Cinema Journal, ed. David Desser. Circ. 1,000. U of IL, Cinema Studies, Urbana IL 61801. 217/244-2705; fax: 24.4(2233. Published by U of Illinois Press for Society for Cinema Studies. ISSN 0009-7101. Began 1961. q\$20. inst \$25. 9Opg.

Cinema News, ed. Don Dohler. Circ. 3,000. 12 Moray Court, Baltimore MD 21236.

Formerly *Amazing Cinema*. Began 1981. 3/yr \$7.

Cinemacabre, ed. George Stover. Circ. 3,000. P.O. Box 1005, Baltimore MD 21285. 301/8280286. ISSN 0198-1064. Fan mag. Began 1979. m \$10 for 3 mos.

Cinemascore: The Film Music Journal, ed. Randall Larson. Circ. 2,000. P.O. Box 70868, Sunnyvale CA 94086. 408/226-9339. ISSN 0277-9803. Technical with interviews, reviews & retros on the art and tech of music for motion pictures. Began 1979. semi-a \$13.

Cinematograph, guest editors, no regular editor. Circ. 1,000. 480 Potrero, San Francisco CA 94110. 415/558-8129. Pub. by Foundation of Art in Cinema, San Francisco Cinematheque. ISSN 0886-6570. Began 1985. annual \$9/foreign: \$20/all inst \$20. 200 pg. Experimental and independent cinema.

Cinemonkey, ed. Douglas HoIm. 1435 N. E. 72nd, Portland OR 97213. 503(248-0849. ISSN 0162-0126. Formerly *Scintilat ion*. Began 1976. Irreg. \$7

CineVue, ed. Bill J. Gee. Circ. 16,000. 32 East Broadway, New York NY 10002. 212/925-8685. Pub. by Asian CineVision, Inc.. Began 1986. 5/yr \$10.

Classic Images, ed. Sue Laimans. Circ. 3,000. P.O. Box 809, Muscatine IA 52761. 31912632331. ISSN 0275-8423. Formerly *Classic Film- Video Images*, *Classic Film Collector*. Eight MM *Collector*. Began 1962. m\$25.

Columbia Film View, ed. Jennifer Robinson, David Wezoer. Circ. 1,000. 513 Dodge Hall. New York NY 10027. 212/280-2842. Pub. by Columbia University School of the Arts, Film Division. Formerly *Columbia Film Review*. Began 1985. 3/yr \$7.50.

CTVD. Cinema TV-Digest, ed. Ben Hamilton. 550 Rte. 1, P.O. Box 202, Newberry SC 29108. 8031276-6870. ISSN 0007-9219. Began 1962. Irreg. \$3 for 4 nos.

Current Research in Film, ed. Bruce Austin. 355 Chestnut Street, Norwood NJ 07648. 201/767-8450. Pub. by Ablex. ISSN 07488580. Began 1985. Book format annual covers audience and economic studies. Price varies.

East-West Film Journal, eds. Wimai Dissanayake, Paul Clark, John Chariot. Circ. 300. 1777 East-West Road, Honolulu HI 96848. 808944-7302/fax: 8081944-7670. Pub. by Hawaii Press, Journals Dept. for Inst. of Culture & Communication, East-West Center. ISSN 0891-6780. Began 1986. semi-an. US & Can: \$15, inst: \$25/foreign: \$25, inst \$30. 64 pg.

Fangoria, classic horror fan magazine.

Field of Vision, ed. Robert A. Hailer. Circ. 600. 135 St. Paul's Ave., Staten Island NY 10301. Began 1976. annual \$12. Irregular, experimental and holography.

Filement, ed. Glenn Lalich. Circ. 1,500. Dept of Theatre Arts, Wright State University, Dayton 01145435. Began 1981. Free.

Film and History, ed. John E. O'Conner. Circ. 450. Historians Film Committee History, NJ Inst of Tech., Newark NJ 07102. 201/ 596-3291. ISSN 0360-3695. Supersedes *Historians Film Committee Newsletter*. Began 1972. q \$12.

Film Comment, ed. Richard T. Jameson. Circ. 35,000. Film Society of Lincoln Center, 70 Lincoln Center Plaza New York NY 10023. 212/877-1800/fax: 212(724-2813. ISSN 0015-119X. Began 1962. 6/yr. \$19.95/ foreign: \$45. 80 pg.

Film Criticism, ed. Lloyd Michaels. Circ. 400. Allegheny College, Meadville PA 16335. Began 1976. 3/yr. \$9/Inst. \$10.

Film Culture, ed. Jonas Mekas. 32 Second Ave., New York NY 10003. Began 1955. Devolved into coverage of the old New American Cinema patriarchs and then ceased publication during the 1980's; recently revived, it continues to celebrate the avant garde of the early 60's. 4/yr. \$20.

Film History: An International Journal, ed. Richard Koszarski. Circ. 1900. Frost Road, Ste. 101, Bristol PA 19007. 215/785-5800/ Fax: 215/785-5515. ISSN 0892-2160. Defunct, 1991; began 1987. q \$80.

Film Journal, ed. Robert Sunshine. Circ. 10,500. 244 W. 49th St., Ste. 305, New York NY 10019. 212/246-6460/fax: 21212656428. ISSN 0199-7300. NB: Jan supplement, Blue Sheets, giving details of coming releases. Began 1934. m \$40.78 pg.

Film Literature Index, eds. Linda Provinzano & Deborah Sternldar. Film & TV Doc Ctr, Richardson 390C, SUNY, Albany NY 12222. ISSN 0093-6758. Began 1973. q \$300/foreign: \$325.

Film Quarterly, ed. Anne Martin. Circ. 6,400. 2120 Berkeley Way, University of California Press, Berkeley CA 94720. 510/ 6426333. ISSN 0015-1386. Began 1945. q \$15, inst \$30/foreign: \$20, inst \$35. 64 pg.

Film Threat, ed. Christian Gore. P.O. Box 951, Royal Oak, MI 48068. 313/545-4673. ISSN 0896-6389. Fan magazine. Began 1991. 6/yr — \$16/foreign: \$26. 70 pg.

Film World, ed. Tim Connelly. Circ. 150,000. 8060 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles CA 90046. 213/653-8060. Began 1968. m \$1350. Reviews and features on heterosexual porn industry.

Filmmakers Review, ed. Jim Berger. Circ. 5,000. Columbia Filmmakers, 313 Ferris Booth Hall, Columbia University, New York NY 10027. Began 1976. q \$15.

Films in Review, ed. Robin Little. Circ. 8,600. P.O. Box 589, New York NY 10021. 212/6281594. Pub. by Nat'l Board of Review of Motion Pictures. ISSN 0015-1688. Began 1950. 6/yr. \$18/foreign: \$22. 70 pg.

Freedonia Gazette, ed. Paul G. Wesolowski. Circ. 400. Darien 28, New Hope PA 18938. 215/862-9734. ISSN 0748-5247. Fan magazine devoted to the Marx Brothers. Began 1978. semi-a \$8.

Freeze Frame, ed. Jennifer Heuff. P.O. Box 89. San Francisco CA 94101-0089. 415/4313886. Pub. by Northern CA Women in Film and TV.

Gore Zone, ed. Anthony Timpone. Circ. 180. 475 Park Ave. So., New York NY 10016. 212/689-2830. Fan magazine pub. By O'Quinn Studios. ISSN 0896-8802. Began 1988. bi-m \$15.99.

Hollywood Stuntmen's Hall of Fame News, ed. John Gilbert Hagner. Circ. 375. 111 E. 100 North. Box 277, Moab UT 84532.801/ 259-6100. Began 1978. 6/yr \$27.50. Fan.

Hollywood Magazine, ed. Al Austin. 7000 Hollywood Blvd.. Cabana 9, Hollywood CA 90028.213/856-9022. Celebrity profiles, behind-the-scenes on filmmaking. TV & music industries, new films, fashion, architecture. Began 1988. bi-m \$10.

Hollywood Reporter, ed. Alex Ben Block. Cite. 25,000. 6715 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood CA 90028. 213/464-7411/fax:213/4698770. ISSN 0018-3660. Began 1930. daily \$1421 foreign \$150, air: \$50/Weekl Edition: \$150.

Hollywood Studio Magazine, ed. Ralph Benner. Circ. 50,000. 3960 Laurel Canyon Ave., Studio City CA 91604. 818/990-5450. Began 1953. 12/yr \$25.97.

In Cinema, ed. Harlan Jacobson. Circ. 605,000. Second Ave. New York NY 10017. Began 1980. 10/yr \$10

Independent, The. Ed. Patricia Thomson. Circ. 4,000. 625 Broadway. 9th Floor, New York NY 10012. 212/473-3400/fax:21217322252. Pub. of the Foundation for Independent Film and Video. ISSN 0731-5198. 10/yr \$45: St \$60.56 pg.

International Documentary, ed. Denise Bigio. Circ. 2,000. 1551 5. Robertson Blvd. Ste 201, Los Angeles CA 90035. 213/655-7089/ Fax: 2131785-9334. Pub. of Int'l Documentary Association. ISSN 0742-5333. Defunct, began 1982. q \$15/Inst. \$25.40 pg.

Journal of Film and Video, ed. Frank Tomasub, Film/Video, Georgia State Univ., University Plaza, Atlanta GA 30303.404/6513200. Cue. 1,300. Pub. of UFVA, Division of Mass Communications. ISSN 0742-4671. Began 1947. Members only. 134 pg.

Journal of Popular Film and Television, eds. Michael Marsden, John o. Nachbar. Circ. 800. Popular Culture Center, Bowling Green State Univ., Bowling Green OH 43403.202/ 3626445. ISSN 0195-6051. Began 1971. q \$24, St \$48.40 pg.

JUMP CUT, eds. John Hess. Chuck Kleinhans, Julia Lesage. Circ. 5,000. P.O. Box 865, Berkeley CA 94701.510/658-4482. ISSN 0146-5546. Began 1974.4 issues: \$14. inst \$20/foreign: \$16. inst \$22, air add \$20. 124 pg.

Kaleidoscope, eds. Don Shay, Ray Cabana, Jr.. Circ. 1,000.45-B Gail Street, Springfield, MA 01108. ISSN 0022-7919. Began 1965. 3/yr \$2.

Landers Film Reviews, ed. Bertha Landers. Circ. 3,600. P.O. Box 27309, Escondido CA 92027.

Lightstruck, Experimental Film Coalition, Filmmaking Dept. School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Columbus and Jackson, Chiago IL 60603. Began 1983. q \$15/Inst \$35. 54 pg.

Literature/Film Quarterly, ed. James M. Welsh. Circ. 700. Salisbury State University, Salisbury MD 21801. 301/543-6000. ISSN 0090-4260. Began 1973. q \$14/inst \$28. 68 pg. Academic.

Media Arts, ed. Douglas W. Edwards. Circ. 12,000. 8949 Wilshire Blvd. Beverly Hills CA 90211. Pub. by National Association of Media Art Centers.

Millennium Film Journal, eds. Tony Pipolo and Grahame Weinbren. 66 East 4th Street, New York NY 10003. Began 1980. 3/yr \$14, inst & foreign: \$20. 78 pg.

Millimeter, ed. Alison Johns. Circ. 30,000. P.O. Box 95759, Cleveland OH 44101. 212/ 4774700. ISSN 0164-9655. Defunct, began 1973. m \$60.

Motion Picture, ed. Marjorie Keller. 41 White Street, New York NY 10013. Pub. of Collective for a Living Cinema. Defunct.

Motion Picture Investor, 126 Clock Tower Place. Cannel CA 93923. 408-624-1536. Pub, by Paul Kegan Associates. ISSN 07428839. Covers investment in public and private movie prod'n and distribution companies; tracks value of motion pic stocks. Began 1984. m \$475.

Movie Mirror, ed. Joan Goldstein. 355 Lexington Ave., New York NY 10017. 212/9496850. ISSN 0027-271X. Began 1957. bi-m \$9.

Movieline. eds. Virginia Campbell and Edward Margulies. Cue. 100,000. 1141 S. Beverly Drive, Beverly Hills CA 90035. 310/ 282-0711/fax: 310/785-9566. ISSN 10550917. Highlights lifestyles of moviemakers. Began 1989.. 11/yr \$15/foreign: \$36. 96 pg.

Movies USA. Cite. 999,999. 8010 Roswell, Ste 212, Atlanta GA 30350. 404/668-0111. Began 1988. m \$18.

Movietone News, ed. Richard T. Jameson. Circ. 1,000. 6556 Palatine Ave., N. Seattle, WA 98103. 206/782-0505. Pub. of Seattle Folklore Society. Began 1971. 10/yr \$7/Inst. \$10. Defunct?

Off-Hollywood, ed. Scott Macaulay. 132 West 21st Street, 6th floor, New York NY 10011. 212/243-7777/fax: 212/243-3882. ISSN 1045-1706. Began 1987. q \$12/inst and foreign: \$35/students: \$10.50 pg.

On Location, ed. Steven Bernard. P.O. Box 2810. Hollywood CA 90028. 213/467-1268. ISSN 0149-7014. Began 1977. m \$66.

On Production, ed. Howard Kenin. 17337 Ventura Blvd. #226, Encino CA 91316. 818/ 9076682. ISSN 0044-7625. New technical pub with same staff as *American Cinemeditor* (a split). Began 1992- 6/yr \$16.50. 48 pg.

Persistence of Vision, eds. Tony Pipolo, et al. Circ. 500. 53-2463rd Street, Maspeth NY 11378. 718/779-3936. Pub. of Film Studies, CUNY. Began 1984. 3/yr \$15. 120 pg.

Photo Screen, ed. Marsha Daly, 355 Lexington Ave., New York NY

10017.212/9496850. ISSN 0031-8566. Began 1965. bi-m \$6.

Post Script, eds. Gerald Duchovnay, J.P. Telone. Circ. 350. Jacksonville University Jacksonville FL 32211. Pub by East Texas State University. Began 1980. 3/yr \$12.inst: \$17 /foreign: \$20, Inst \$25. 124 pg.

Premiere, ed. Susan Lyne. Circ. 375,000.2 Park Ave., New York NY 10016.21Z(7257926/fax: (212) 725-3442. Pub. by Murdoch Magazines (Tarrytown). Fills journalistic gap between scholarly film and fan mags; interviews and articles about current film. Began 1987. m \$18/foreign: \$42. 104 pg.

Psychotronic Video, ed. Michael Weldon, 151 First Ave., New York NY 10003. 212/6733823. Fan magazine. 6/yr \$20/Can: \$22/ foreign: \$45. 64 pg.

Quarterly Review of Film and Video, ed. Michael Renov. Circ. 1,000. School of CinemaTV, USC, Los Angeles CA 90089-2211. Pub. by Redgrave. ISSN 0146-0013. Began 1976. q \$63. 128 pg.

Release Print, ed. Robert Anbian. 346 Ninth Street, 2nd floor, San Francisco CA 94103. 415/552-8760. Pub of Film Arts Foundation. ISSN 0890-5231.

Screen World, ed. John Willis, 225 Park Ave. S., New York NY 10003. 212/2541600. Pub by Crown Publishers. ISSN 00808288. Began 1949. annual \$19.95.

Sightlines, ed. Ray Rolff. Circ. 3,000. 920 Barnsdale Road, Suite 152, La Grange IL 60525. 708/482-4000. Pub. of American Film and Video Association. Began 1977. q \$16, inst \$20.40 pg.

SMPTE Journal, ed. Jeffrey Friedman. Circ. 12,000. 595 W, Hartsdale Ave., White Plains NY 10607. 914/761-1100. Technical pub. of Society of Motion Picture and TV Engineers. ISSN 0036-1682. Began 1916. m \$75/ foreign: \$85. 80 pg.

Spectator, The, ed. Abraham Ferrer. 263 S. Los Angeles Street., Ste. 307, Los Angeles CA 90012. Newsletter for Friends of Visual Communication, supporters of Asian American work in visual communication. q membership.

Spectator, The, ed. Walter Morton. Div. of Critical Studies, Cinema/TV, USC, Los Angeles CA 90089-2211. 2131740-3334/fax: 213/740-7682. ISSN 1051-0230. 2/yr \$10. instic \$20/foreign: \$15. instit: \$25. 88 pg.

Variety (daily), ed. Stephen West. 5700 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 120, Los Angeles CA 90036. 213/857-6600/fax: 213/857-0494. ISSN 0011-5509. Began 1933. US&Cart \$129/foreign: \$239, air: \$950. 24 pg tabloid.

Variety (weekly). ed. Peter Bart 475 Park Ave. So., New York NY 10016.212/7791100/fax: (212) 779-0026. ISSN 0042-2738. Began 1905. \$129/Can: \$155/Europe: \$250/ rest: \$450/world-wide surface: \$195. 106 pg. tabloid.

Velvet Light Trap, Editorial Groups at U of Wisconsin and U of Texas. Circ. 3,500. Dept of Com. Arts, Vilas Hall, U of WI Madison WI 53706. Pub. by U TX Press, Journals, Box 7819. Austin, TX, 78713. ISSN 0149-1830. Began 1971. 6/yr \$15. ins: \$28/foreign: \$17.50, inst \$30.50. 94 pg.

Visions, ed. Marie-France Alderman, Boston Film/Video Foundation, 1126
Boylston St., Boston MA 02215. Began 1990.4/yr \$10/ foreign: \$20. 60 pg.

Westerns and Serials, ed. Norman Kietzer. Circ. 2,000. Rt 1, Box 103, Vernon
Center, MN 56090. 507/549-3677. For those interested in old westerns and serials.
Began 1974. q \$16.

Wide Angle, ed. Jeanne Hall. Circ. 2,500. Ohio University School of Film, 378
Lindley Hall, Athens OH 45701. Pub. by Johns Hopkins U Press. ISSN 0160-6840.
Began 1978. q \$20, inst \$46/foreign: \$26.75, inst: \$52.75. 65 pg.

A slightly different version of this article originally appeared in *CineAction*, ed. Guy
Hennebelle, 106 Blvd. St-Denis, 9240 Cowberrie, France.

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Berlin Film Festival '93 Identity and politics

by Inez Hedges

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 123-126, 95
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"After the happy end, you should keep on filming."

This statement by one of the women factory workers in Völker Koepp's documentary *NEUES IN WITTSTOCK* (WHAT'S NEW IN WITTSTOCK), shown in the Young Filmmakers' section of the '93 Berlin Film Festival (the "Berlinale"), best summarizes the tenor of those new German films which address the problems of post-reunification Germany.

Between 1974 and 1984, Koepp, who was born in East Germany in 1944, filmed the same group of women clothing-factory workers in an attempt to portray everyday life in the GDR (German Democratic Republic). After the fall of the Wall (in German parlance, "Die Wende," or "The Change"), the women contacted him and asked to be filmed again. Koepp's latest film mixes footage from the past with new interviews and shots of the now privatized factory. The result is a unique document on the struggle for socialism and the radical change in the women's prospects and outlook after the *Wende*.

In a scene from *NEUES IN WITTSTOCK*, the representative of the economic trust or "Treuhand" (charged with privatizing 400 local businesses) explains how the whole region has to be "rechristianized" so that church taxes can be collected. In another, a fortune-teller confesses she doesn't know the card for unemployment (the factory went from 2,700 to 700 employees after the *Wende*). New street names appear above the old ones: St. Marienstrasse (St. Mary Street) for Karl-Marx Strasse. Later, the old names are removed and only the blank rectangles of freshly uncovered paint remain as a memory. In interviews the women explain how their entire frame of reference has changed — in the GDR, life came first and work second; now, work is primary (for those who are lucky enough to be employed), and "it's everyone for herself." Modern shopgirls the same age as the women Koepp started filming in 1974 have new concerns. They complain that foreigners are taking away their jobs.

The effect of Koepp's film is to valorize the life experience of people who are continually being made to feel that they are the defeated in a reunited Germany — that forty years of trying to build socialism were a waste of time since it didn't

"work." In several instances, Koepp films the women as they react to seeing their earlier interviews on a monitor — a visual enactment of self-definition and self-reflection.

Despite his focus on women, Koepp could hardly be called a feminist. He initially stopped filming in 1984, he explained, because after the women got married and started families he couldn't imagine that they would ever do anything worth filming again. The collapse of the state finally shook him loose from this "happy end."

Documentary films in the GDR were made by filmmakers with full-time employment in the state-sponsored "DEFA" studio. Often, these films were sponsored for propagandistic purposes. Mother director, Winfried Junge, made nine films about thirteen members of the same kindergarten class in Golzow (near Frankfurt an der Oder) beginning in 1961. His new compilation film of almost five hours, DREHBUCH: DIE ZEITEN (SCREENPLAY: THE TIMES) follows a strategy similar to that of NEUES IN WITTSTOCK, and, like Koepp's project, recalls that of British filmmaker Michael Apted (SEVEN-UP to THIRTY-UP). But Junge now ironizes the idealistic tone of the previous films by recontextualizing earlier scenes in order to question the truthfulness of the film image. In one instance, he replays three different takes of the same scene, thus laying bare the artificiality of documentary "realism." By implication, he leads us to question any film's claim to portray reality — including those made in the West without official censorship.

The second film Koepp premiered at the film festival, SAMMELSURIUM (COLLECTOR'S CHOICE), takes its title from a museum in the Elbe region where GDR artifacts are being collected. Koepp's film is his own collection, a connoisseur's album of images. He takes us to rooms holding miles of Stasi (State Security) files, to the construction site outside Berlin where large segments of the Wall are ground up to dust, to the preview room of the (now defunct) DEFA where filmmakers presented their works to the censors and studio heads during screenings that were often attended by the head of State. In the museum itself (which has now been granted government subsidies), the head of Karl Marx in Meissen porcelain is put on show, along with typical factory products: radios, household items, statuettes.

Koepp's tone is far from elegiac — he collects images as a sign of the pastness of the GDR. Nevertheless, his SAMMELSURIUM has its own eloquence. Strangely, both he and the Yugoslavian exile Dusan Makavejev film the same dismantling of the gigantic statue that was the East Berlin Lenin Memorial. Makavejev's feature, THE GORILLA BATHES AT NOON, focuses on a Russian soldier who is stranded in Berlin after his company returns to Russia. In the story, the soldier is a witness to the statue's removal and accompanies the head on the back of a truck to its final resting place. The statue's demise is seen through the eyes of one person with whom it is difficult to identify. Koepp cuts out the surrounding context and chooses instead a dramatic shot of Lenin's head floating freely in space at the end of a crane. The documentary has more force than the fiction here; Koepp has managed to find a visceral image of the violence and abruptness of the *Wende*.

Violence in Germany was the focus of a group of films shown under the rubric "Against Racism." STAU — YEZT GEHT'S LOS! (ALL STOPPED UP — HERE IT COMES!), by 38-year-old East German Thomas Heiser, followed the daily life of

five "skinheads" in East Germany. In interviews, the young men (16 to 19) expressed theft sense of disorientation. One member of a neo-nazi club even said that he missed the "FDJ" — the former socialist youth organization of the GDR. "It was a wonderfully thought-out system for making and keeping people happy," he says. A girlfriend complains that her Western counterparts (Wessis) treat her like a "dumb Ossie" (slang for East German). One youth bragged that he bought his first gun with the "Welcome money" that West Germany traditionally offered to East German immigrants.

The close-up on youth violence offered by STAU at once disarms and alarms. At first, their political analysis of the state does not seem all that wrong: "The state's power is based on violence," says one, "violence begets violence." But the spectator grows uncomfortable when attacks against foreigners are presented as "self-defense." Unprovoked acts of violence are ascribed to *der Frust* — "frustration." The "Sieg Heil" salute is, according to the interviewees, just a protest gesture. These young men see themselves as victims, they're anti-capitalist and also opposed to the educational system of the GDR that made them ashamed of being German by dwelling on the Nazi past.

A skinhead bakes a cake during his interview, seems embarrassed and vulnerable in front of the camera which records his teenage pimples. But later at the club in the security of their peers, the young men are all energy, stomping wildly to rock music with anti-Turkish lyrics, showing off their tattooed swastikas, awarding costume prizes. First and second prizes go to the boy and girl in police uniforms; third prize goes to a guy dressed up as a "pinko commie." Later we learn that there are three court cases pending against one young man who was involved in a fight while "protecting" this club from Yugoslavian immigrant workers. This is not America, they say — we're not a "multicultural" society. Many of them sport jackets with slogans: "I'm proud of being a German," "German Power," "The Honor of Your People Is Also Your Honor."

If Heiser's strategy is to humanize the skinheads by letting them voice their concerns, Christoph Schlingensief's *TERROR 2000 — INTENSIVE STATION GERMANY* cuts a surrealistic swath through German society. In this film, everyone seems to be following André Breton's dictum, "the most surrealist act in the world is to go down into the street and begin shooting randomly." *TERROR 2000* was not even shown as part of the festival, and had to be viewed at a special screening organized by the alternative weekly *Tip*. This slight gave Schlingensief the opportunity to complain about censorship and garnered him quite a large audience.

At 33, Schlingensieff is one of West Germany's youngest and most controversial filmmakers. Earlier films include *100 YEARS OF ADOLPH HITLER — THE LAST HOUR IN THE FUHRER'S BUNKER* (1989) and *THE GERMAN CHAINSAW MASSACRE — THE FIRST HOUR OF REUNIFICATION* (1990). *TERROR 2000* (whose title mocks the "Berlin 2000" campaign slogan that aims to bring the Olympics to Berlin in the year 2000) completes the trilogy that explores violence and hate in German society. It begins with the assassination of a Polish family on a train on their way to an asylum for foreigners in Rassau (East Germany). The investigators from the Bundeskriminalamt (German FBI) prove as violent as the assassins, and even the refugees stage a violent demonstration. The assassin's

woman friend gets excited when she sees foreigners being beaten up and masturbates. Schlingensief is the most extreme of the young filmmakers in that he offers no moral center. He portrays a society out of control, in which the Ku Klux Klan and a sheriff from an U.S. Western show up at the funeral for the assassinated refugees alongside the Minister of State.

Few people in Germany will get to see this film, which has become one of the first victims of the new "antiviolence commission" of the Association of German TV and Film Directors. According to a February issue of *Tip*, directors are instructed in the future to consider their moral, ethical, and humanitarian responsibilities to society when creating their works. As *Tip* argues, "television is reacting to real violence by curtailing the representation of violence." No show date has been set for *TERROR 2000*, despite the fact that it was co-produced by German television.

Nevertheless, the Berlinale continues to be the only way to view a representative sampling of new German films, many of which will never be exported outside of Germany. The festival has traditionally also been particularly strong in East European films. This year, because of harsh economic conditions, the offerings were scanty. However, two notable films from the Czech Republic and Romania contrasted favorably with Helma Sanders-Brahms's failed attempt to portray East German realities in *APFELBAUME* (APPLE TREES).

Vera Chytilova's protagonist Bohus in *THE INHERITANCE* is a good-for-nothing loafer who never lifted a finger to build a socialist society. Now that the socialist project has collapsed, he comes into a big inheritance. He spends it cynically, buying the friendship of a prostitute, paying for a merry-go-round for the village (but refusing to sponsor any real improvements), taking the men from his village on a bus trip to town where they thoroughly disgrace themselves by starting a brawl in an expensive restaurant. He also instantly changes into a cruel capitalist, firing some of his newly-inherited employees as an exercise in pure power. Though somewhat broadly drawn, Chytilova's picture of the post-socialist era functions effectively as a bitterly satirical putdown of the new capitalism. Her genius lies in the details — the ostrich that Bohus buys his high-priced girlfriend as a birthday gift, his Eurodisney shirt, the opening shot of the film that shows a handful of ants busily dragging off the carcass of a moth. By picking out elements from the diegetic space, Chytilova effortlessly weaves metaphors into her story, implying that the new capitalist order returns man to a state of nature in which money begets violence.

Lucian Pintilie's French/Romanian co-production *LE CHENE* (THE OAK TREE) begins with a long traveling shot that traverses the garbage-strewn terrain in front of an apartment complex — headless dolls, polluted water, all sorts of trash. The camera moves up the stairs and enters an equally disreputable apartment where Nela (a young woman) and her father lie in bed watching old home movies. The father spills his glass of milk and dies. A sister bangs on the door but Nela drives her away by lighting a fire inside the apartment. Somehow Nela has to fulfill her father's last wish — to donate his body to medical research. But there are no refrigerators, and the hospitals aren't interested. The film moves from disaster to disaster in a symbolic reenactment of the chaos of the last days of the Ceausescu regime.

THE OAK TREE and *THE INHERITANCE* portray society on the brink of chaos.

Looking at these testimonials from the former socialist countries serves to validate the extremism of a film like *TERROR 2000*.

With the exception of *SILENT COUNTRY (STILLES LAND)* by recent film school graduate Andreas Dresen, no East Germans presented features about Germany after the *Wende*. East German screenwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase made his directorial debut (with co-director Gabriele Denecke) with a coming-of-age romance set at the end of World War II. At the press conference following the film, he said he was not yet ready to treat more contemporary material, since the East German past is continually being revised in daily news bulletins. Denecke stated that she is thinking about doing a film set in an East German village in the 50s.

The West German director Helma Sanders-Brahms evidently did not feel the same scruples as her eastern compatriots, and filmed an East German story in *APPLE TREES*, a film screened not at the festival but at the parallel "film market," where distributors and producers make deals. A young socialist woman moves to the country to take part in an agricultural project because she is attracted to the bucolic life her grandmother lives in the region. She is subjected to the corruption and sexual harassment of the local party leader. Without explanation, she turns against her husband and seems more and more attracted to the "high life" of inner party circles. The local party leader turns out to be an opportunist who ends up going to the West. Thus he is a figure similar to Chytilova's protagonist. Yet Sanders-Brahms, as a West German telling a story about the East, lacks legitimacy. It doesn't help that she remains distant from her main protagonist even though the story is presented mainly in the first person with a voice-over narration. Her story seems predictable and second-hand. As the well-known East Berlin political songwriter Reinhold Andert said to me in an interview, "The Wessis want to come over here and tell us how it was with socialism."

STILLES LAND (SILENT COUNTRY) shows how powerfully the story of people coming to terms with the *Wende* can be told. It is the first feature by 30-year old Andreas Dresen who graduated in 1992 from the Babelsberg film school "Konrad Wolf," and the debut feature-length screenplay by 28-year old Laila Stieler. In the fall of 1989, a young theater director comes to the provinces to put on Beckett's *WAITING FOR GODOT*. He argues for the play's contemporary relevance:

"It's a mirror of our world today...we can't keep on going, either forward or back. And so we're waiting — no idea why."

As the cast rehearses, the defective television transmits images of East Germans crossing over into Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Change comes to the remote town as well: the actors and theater management take part in candlelit vigils in the church and in the streets, then join a demonstration bearing the familiar banner "Wir sind das Volk!" (We Are the People!). A protest statement by the actors demanding open public discussion is presented to the theater manager. He signs, but doesn't mail it until the *Wende* is announced officially on TV.

Meanwhile, the events have had an effect on the play as well. Instead of hopelessness, the director now wants to communicate a different message: it is Vladimir's and Estragon's own fault if they can't get moving. What are they waiting for? The screenwriter and director have thus neatly worked in two alternative interpretations of the Beckett play. On the one hand, the seemingly

insurmountable waiting of Vladimir and Estragon (played as an old heterosexual married couple) is presented as a mirror of GDR reality before the *Wende*; in the second interpretation, the passivity of the couple is criticized — they have only to take history into their own hands to get moving.

History itself moves quickly to validate this insight as the opening of the Berlin wall is announced on television. The whole company gets on the bus to witness the event but the engine won't start — like the TV and the phone system, everything mechanical in the GDR seems close to breaking down. The assistant director ends up hitchhiking alone to Berlin, and returns four days later with Thomas, a theater director from the West.

The play's dress rehearsal is a success, and Thomas has organized flyers and publicity. But the audience fails to show up. East Germans don't want East German culture anymore. In the final shots of the film, the young East German director imagines in succession a West German road with its clearly demarcated yellow stripe and an East German road bordered by weeds. He opts for the East German way, and decides to stay in the "silent country" to build up the theater once more.

STILLES LAND was a well-kept secret at the Berlinale. The International Forum of Young Filmmakers (a subsection of the festival that screens documentaries and features outside of the main competition) only organized one special screening instead of the multiple screenings allowed for the other films (a fate that also befell NEUES IN WITTSTOCK). Thus only a few people got to see the most interesting new German fiction film of the post-*Wende* period. Whether intentionally or not, the organizers of the Forum contributed to the devaluing of East German culture by placing the film on a different exhibition schedule from the other films. Fortunately the Berlin-based distributors, Ex Picturis, were willing to lend videotapes to those who missed seeing the STILLES LAND.

Dresen's film is remarkable because it brilliantly reenacts the events of 1989 from the point of view of those who were most affected by them: the East Germans. It does so with refreshing modernism — the story structure of the film bears similarities to Fellini's *8 1/2* and to Buñuel's *THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE*. However, Dresen grounds the aporia of his artist/protagonist in the concrete political and social situation of the GDR. His film — technically sophisticated and graced with excellent acting — conveys a picture of the East with an immediacy that no West German director has achieved.

Simultaneously with the festival, the prestigious Berliner Ensemble in East Berlin was offering the premiere of Rolf Hochhuth's episodic play *WESSIS IN WEIMAR*. Despite being a "Wessie," or West German himself, Hochhuth portrays the subjugation and colonization of eastern Germany by Western capitalists in the starkest terms. The East German director Einar Schleef went several steps further, creating a *mise-en-scene* in which the actors were naked on stage, unless they were wearing ill-fitting Nazi military coats, or draperies the color of the German flag. In place of Hochhuth's individual acting parts, he substituted choruses that further accentuated the strangulation of the East by the West. The stage itself was a huge empty platform demarcated by the backdrop of a massive wall. It was so bare and spacious that kids were able to play a soccer game on stage during intermission. In place of Hochhuth's dialogue, Schleef had the actors declaim the playwright's explanatory essays. His staging interpolated texts from Schiller, Brecht's "In Praise

of the Communist Party" (later removed because the Brecht family refused the rights to this piece), and FDJ (Freie Deutsche Jugend) songs — a full ninety minutes of material not in the original.

In a public statement distributed to theatergoers, Hochhuth protested that his play had been violated. At issue was the same question that kept recurring at the film festival — who speaks for whom? Despite the author's protests, the play was a huge *succès de scandale*. On the night I attended, a young man from the audience leapt onstage and marched against the militarily clad actors to loud audience encouragement. The Berlin newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* noted especially the Brechtian quality of the performance — the way it raised questions about the present and threw the audience off-balance while offering a fascinating *mise-en-scène*.

In this time of massive social upheaval and change in Germany, audiences packed the theaters and film screenings that claimed to shed some light on the current situation. Indeed, the staying power of the audience that sat through the epic DREHBUCH — DIE ZEITEN amazed its director. Although no "masterpieces" surfaced at the Berlinale, there was ample evidence that the art of film, not only as witness to the times, but also as agent of change, is still very much alive.

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JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

The last word Teaching the "other," being white, male, and middle class

by Chuck Kleinhans

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 127-130

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It seemed to happen by chance. Without deliberate planning, for the past twenty some years of teaching I've frequently taught "the Other" in the dual sense of teaching about people/cultures different from my own identity (the main sense in which I'll use the term in what follows), and teaching specific students who are other than male, white, and middle class, to use three categories of my identity. To clarify who I am, I could add a few other identity categories that I'm usually reminded of daily: married, heterosexual, U.S. citizen, childless, professor, Chicagoan, political radical, and middle aged.

I want to reflect on my experience here because it may be useful to people interested in issues of "multicultural education," to use the current term, in understanding their own histories and connections to diversity in education issues. Also, I think I've learned some things about course planning, classroom strategy, and student advising that apply to many arts, humanities, and social science teaching situations.

THE DOUBLE BIND

I'll start with the most obvious point: teaching the Other immediately creates a double bind. On the one hand, people can say you lack qualifications to teach about an Other unless you belong to that group. (I'll return to this point.) On the other hand, one can say that you are something-centric (or racist, sexist, homophobic, or whatever), if you don't include the Other in your teaching. I think that the only ethical thing to do is just acknowledge the double bind. Then you go ahead and teach the Other, acknowledging the problems, and acting with humility to learn what you can from and about the Other in the process of preparing to teach. Hopefully, you can then create a classroom climate that lets those Others taking the course contribute to the group learning and to educating the teacher.

In other words, I'm arguing that the ground rules for classroom learning about diversity include the teacher specifying where he/she is coming from. That allows for reflection on how teachers and students move from ignorance to knowledge. This makes many teachers uncomfortable. They are used to controlling the

learning situation in a fairly direct, if benevolent, way.

There's a commonplace of liberal thought which assumes that presenting "multiple perspectives" on a theme or issue or encouraging "different views" in and of itself leads to progressive education. But this view remains blind to the fundamental control the teacher has in forming the curriculum, rewarding and discouraging students in verbal and nonverbal ways, and the fact that classes end with the teacher giving a grade. In the 1960s, reacting to both authoritarian and liberal versions of the classroom, one strain of New Left thought argued for a totally democratized classroom without any hierarchy. But experiments based on such a model quickly showed that power was not evacuated but simply constructed in more subtle and often more pernicious ways.

My argument for starting from the open recognition of one's own historical position, one's own privilege, one's own ignorance, and as a teacher one's position of power in the classroom stems from my understanding that if these things are put forward directly, they can then be open for discussion. Today we're at an interesting juncture in multiculturalism in higher education. From a past in the late 60s and early 70s establishment of programs and departments usually related to social-political movements and based in identity politics, we've seen an economic and administrative retrenchment putting many of these units at risk. An increasingly virulent attack from academic and political conservatives, criticizing Political Correctness, defends the canon. At the same time, we've seen significant changes in higher education as a result of changing demographics and a changing workforce. Education in cultural and gender difference today prepares students to be tomorrow's managers and professionals. (Previous JUMP CUT editorials in issues 34, 36, and 37, discussed some of these issues.)

My argument is not based on the idea that somehow we are "all oppressed" or that we can simply through good will step aside from our personal evolution. Rather, I'm saying that the teacher must begin by finding the locations where one moves from ignorance to knowledge. That's a pragmatic answer. I can also make the point more philosophically.

"Identity politics" has been important in bonding various social-political movements in the last 45 years or so, particularly in the United States. However, identity politics often relies on the assumption that inside this group or movement, "we're all alike." In this way it falls into a fateful essentialism. On reflection, the argument of identity politics that "we're all alike" involves a disastrous slippage from the common sense observation that, "we have something in common that binds us together," to a whacky oversimplification.

We can see the historical results of such a position today in the hostile nationalisms devouring eastern Europe, and repressive religious fundamentalism in Islam and elsewhere. But we also see it in U.S. social movements when they've had problems coming to terms with diversity and variety in their own constituency. As many feminists now admit, sometimes feminism hasn't dealt adequately with race and class. And sometimes racial/ethnic movements haven't dealt well with gender and class issues. And frequently class-based movements ranging from trade unions and community organizations to left organizations and projects haven't dealt well with race and gender issues.

My answer to this part of the dilemma rests on what I see as the historical fact of cross-cultural exchange and what seems like a universal human curiosity about Others. Cultural exchange probably always starts with some level of misunderstanding on both sides. But we don't have to be afraid of that, if we recognize the complications of power differentials and try to come to terms with them: a point to which I'll return.

Much more could be said about this. Basically, I don't think anyone can take on the double bind of teaching the Other without experiencing the combination of skepticism and interest (sometimes the extremes of hostility and gratefulness) which Others have in finding you talking about Them. Also, it can't be solved in the abstract, so let me speak concretely about my experiences, narrowing it down to the question of how I teach African American issues in the film classroom.

EXPERIENCE/CREDENTIALS

I'd like to explain briefly my own history in dealing with African American issues and film. Like many other young white people of my generation (b. 1942), I came to adulthood with the strong cultural influence of African American music. In particular I listened to and learned about jazz on Chicago radio, and later rhythm and blues, and blues. At the same time, in the later 50s and early 60s, the Civil Rights Movement was a decisive formative influence in demonstrating the effective linking of moral/ethical concerns and political action. These were, I want to point out, fundamentally mediated experiences-things that influenced me from the media, from mass culture. Growing up first in a predominantly Polish and European working class neighborhood in Chicago, and then going to high school in a white middle class suburb, Park Ridge, Illinois, I had some understanding of ethnicity but no direct knowledge of black Americans or other people of color, until, in summer jobs, I worked with them.

In graduate school in Comparative Literature at Indiana University I took a course in African and African American literature and was involved in tutoring black students admitted under a special program to increase minority numbers at IU. Subsequently I was asked by Afro-American Studies to teach a section of the freshman introductory course in Comp Lit for these students. Before I accepted the offer, I asked if it wouldn't be better to have a black teacher in the classroom. Of course, I was told, but there wasn't one, so didn't I think it would be better to have me in the situation than Any Teacher? Of course, I agreed, and I changed the curriculum to have a major section on African, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-American literature.

What was clear from this was that institutional/ structural/ economic constraints shape any such situation. I also saw that no one individual teacher could really overcome those limits alone. To fail to acknowledge those problems and not to try to work on them results in a selective vision that can easily lead to antagonism with colleagues. Certainly including more about blacks or women in the curriculum is a good thing and a long sought goal. Obviously, given the current economic crunch in higher education, the faculty who have sacrificed to build ethnic studies programs and women's studies programs can hardly feel this is such a wonderful thing for white men to be doing when their own precarious programs are being cut.

Later, I taught freshman and remedial English part time at Chicago State, an

historically black school which enrolled a student body at that time about 80% African American and overall about 90% of which were the first in their families to go to college. I also taught composition and English as a Second Language to Latinos part time at Northeastern Illinois, a school with a very large working class base and racial/ethnic diversity.

Since 1977 I've taught in the Radio/TV/Film department at Northwestern, an elite private school, which enrolls about 8% African American undergraduates and which in the current economic/demographic phase of higher education is trying to recruit black middle class students. At NU I've had a chance to teach many different black films and tapes and even, once, an entire course on independent African American film. I've done some research and writing on the subject, but I wouldn't call myself a specialist on the subject. That is, I don't consider myself an expert, but I seem to know more about the subject than almost any other white teachers I've met

TEACHING STRATEGY: PROBLEMS AND CONTROVERSIES

The most important thing I have to say about teaching black film in general, and independent African American tapes and films in particular, from the position of being a white teacher, is that it is very important to "teach the problems." That is, the teacher must recognize and be prepared for different issues that come up with reference to specific films. Then one must teach in such a way as to make it clear to all the students that there is a significant question at stake, that there is controversy of opinions on the matter, and that different people will have different reactions.

Let me give an example: if you show Spike Lee's *SHE'S GOTTA HAVE IT*, you have to be prepared for a discussion of his depiction of women (actually this applies to all the Lee films), and, I would argue, provoke it if it doesn't happen. Similarly, if you teach his film *SCHOOL DAZE*, you have to be ready for a discussion of the color line and class/caste line in the middle class black student community. Of course everyone knows that Lee's work has been controversial as when some white critics feared that *DO THE RIGHT THING* would provoke blacks to riot. But there's another level of commentary and criticism of the piece represented among African American critics, and the point I want to make is that it's important to be aware of that too. Michelle Wallace and bell hooks (Gloria Watkins) discussed Lee and his depiction of women in articles now reprinted in their recent anthologies. Robert Chrisman wrote a powerful critique of the politics of *DO THE RIGHT THING* in *The Black Scholar*. Whoopi Goldberg tartly responded to Lee's earlier public criticism of the comedian and offered her own analysis of the flaws in *JUNGLE FEVER* on an Home Box Office special. And independent videomaker Marlon Riggs has critiqued Lee's homophobia.

In other words, it's important to realize that there's not one white opinion or interpretation of a Lee film and not one black interpretation of it, but a number of different interpretations. So, part of the necessary research in preparation for teaching has to be to find examples of those different positions. To develop this the teacher must make the effort to look "on the margins of the margins." One must ask oneself, "Well, how do black women filmmakers handle these issues? What issues do they deal with that might be different from the current attention given to urban black youth and criminals by many of the current crop of African American

male filmmakers?"

What I'm calling for then, is for a teacher who is not only choosing to show black films (stage one) but also to be aware of the issues and criticism surrounding those films in the African American community as well as the white press (stage two). And finally, the teacher needs to be attentive to emerging trends and voices (stage three). We could call stage one the Arsenio Hall approach of putting black celebrity artists up front with a spotlight. Stage two involves realizing and working with the actual complexities of the subject and accepting the fact of diversity and contradiction in the artistic production as well as in the African American community. The third stage involves seeking the cutting edge, the ferment on the margins, the place where change and development is still in the process of happening. Personally, for me this last stage is the most interesting. It involves research of the most exciting kind.

I would argue that to merely do the first thing — to simply show and celebrate black film — is doing the right thing. It is good because it gives audiences, black and white, a chance to see important work, and it gives students much to experience and think about. But in the long run ends up being a kind of patronizing racism for whites to not be aware of and take seriously both the questions raised by such work and the actual ongoing criticism and discussion of these films by African American critics. And the teacher misses some of the most interesting things if not alert to emerging trends, new artists, yet-to-be-validated work.

On the other hand, I'm equally wary of white teachers (and exhibitors and critics) taking up this or that film or tape and giving it the validation of extended consideration. It is all too easy for teachers and critics (black and white) to perform that intellectual task we've been so well trained for — making a strong and assertive judgement of value. The problem with this act at the present moment is that obviously whites have more power as a group and, in many cases individually, to validate some works. And such a validation will often be within the framework of what is already familiar to the teacher's frame of reference. It may be relatively easy to validate the current "homeboys" films because action and gang violence genres and themes are well known in mainstream white commercial cinema. But the beauties of a languid pace and different visual rhythms in Julie Dash's *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST* may escape the instructor not familiar with the director's debts to certain traditions in African American women's literature.

And as the teacher who has designed a course and will grade students at the end, one has much power to shape understanding. We know that selective filtering was one of the problems that came up in the Harlem Renaissance when you had white gatekeepers making decisions about what was worthy of publication and critical acclaim. Though I would add that much of the denunciation of that phenomenon has been facile and doesn't begin to address what was in the arrangement for both sides. The actual facts of and potential for whites and African Americans establishing bonds of personal friendship, intellectual mutual respect, and artistic collaboration remains open to consideration.

The point is — to return to my pragmatic assertion that we must "teach the problems" — we must keep open the possibilities of different interpretations, of different value systems being brought to bear on creative work. This is good pedagogy, and it is also common sense. After all, we want students to be able to

interact critically with a work and with each other in classroom discussion. By "teaching the problems" we are able to create the space for questions to be raised, for example questioning Spike Lee's ability to fully address some of the issues he brings up in his films, or his ability to create plausible female characters, or to take issue with some of his apparent positions.

This also addresses an important question in classroom dynamics. If one is teaching black media to a predominantly white class, a certain "burden of representation" is put on African American students in the class. This is most severe when there is only one or a few black students. What I'm referring to is the tendency of that student or those particular students to be taken as representing all African American people. Thus by expressing an opinion on this or that aspect of the film in discussion, a student can be taken as The Authority ("Gee, I guess that that's what all black people would think of that scene"). Such a dynamic clearly gets in the way of a pedagogically challenging classroom experience for white and black students. A work such as *SCHOOL DAZE* operates in a certain somewhat Brechtian way to divide its black audience. That is viewers are asked to identify with one of the two campus groups depicted — the assimilationist "wannabees" and the nationalist "jigaboos" (although significantly, the working class local community is also shown in the significant scene at the fried chicken place). Thus a polarized discussion should follow the screening.

I should add here two things. Simply to think/ teach/ write with this multiple focus, one is driven to the extended aside, footnote, and parenthetical expression, a fact of dialectical thinking — to use a good Marxist phrase — or "dialogism" to use a hip euphemism currently popular in poststructuralist circles. We need to develop complex ways of thinking about such cultural phenomena. Second, I've started using Spike Lee as a reference point precisely because his work is so well known and accessible on video at this point that I can trust most of my readers have seen some of his work. In addition, given his remarkable achievements as a filmmaker, Lee inevitably takes a position in critical discourse as someone whose work can be criticized in a shorthand way without distorting the significance of the films as might be the case with lesser known or less accomplished figures.

A LITTLE CONCLUSION

I don't have an all-purpose one-size-fits-all formula for the double bind of teaching the culture of an Other. I do think that on a simple existential level, almost everyone can actually understand and empathize with otherness in one way or another. In a certain sense everyone is an Other one way or another. Raised as a Christian Scientist, some of my strongest childhood memories are of feeling distinctly different and misunderstood by being part of a peculiar sect.

And in the past decade I've sometimes experienced some pretty unpleasant ageism when working with some ignorant twenty-somethings. And I've even discovered that I belong to an Equal Opportunities "protected category," Vietnam era veterans-though I don't really know what to make of that. But to simply discuss difference without also discussing power linked to difference is to undercut real understanding and the possibility for effective action for change. Which means that in the final analysis, one must move as well into institutional and political understanding of the situation.

Finally one must move from understanding to action directed at change. Multiculturalism can never be fully implemented simply by having teachers of good will do their individual best. Institutional structures intervene, and issues of program support, faculty hiring, student financial aid, recruiting and admissions practices, the campus social climate, and many others have to be taken into account along with curriculum change. To that end, forming effective organizations for change and alliances on campus and with off campus constituencies is the logical continuation of a commitment to multiculturalism in the classroom.

Earlier versions of some of these remarks were given at the Society for Cinema Studies, the Midwest Modern Language Association, and the Chicago Screen Educators. I want to thank Phyllis Klotman (Indiana University), Peter Rose (Miami University), and Patricia Erens (Rosary College), for the invitations to address the topic.

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Teaching the multicultural requirement

by Julia Lesage

from *Jump Cut*, no. 38, June 1993, pp. 130-132, 122

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I teach at the University of Oregon, where all undergraduates must take at least three credit hours in a course that focuses on race, gender, or non-European cultures. Here it's called the race/gender requirement; on other campuses it's called the multicultural requirement. Women's studies and ethnic studies faculty fought for this institutional change. Yet their victory has ironically given that faculty a large added task since this is the group of people who most conscientiously implement the new university-wide requirement.

As someone who has taught feminist film criticism for over twenty years, I had come to enjoy teaching classes that functioned like women's consciousness raising groups as well as being sites for imparting information and teaching analytic skills. It was a shock to walk into my first feminist film criticism class after the race/gender requirement had been enacted and find that I now had to teach a divided student population — those committed to the area of study and accepting some of its basic propositions (e.g., women are an oppressed group) and those who were taking the course just to fulfill the graduation requirement. In other words, in schools that have enacted similar multicultural/gender "basic education" course requirements, the women's studies and ethnic studies courses have a good number of students, often white men, who come in with a begrudging attitude.

In many ways, I also have a begrudging attitude in dealing with this changed student clientele for feminist criticism classes that were formerly a joy to teach. The courses had been intellectually stimulating because, often with mainly women students in the class, we could work at an advanced level of conceptualization relatively quickly. Student writing and research was often publishable or the embryo of a thesis or dissertation. Now the classes seem to begin and stay at the most rudimentary level of intellectual discourse. I understand that my pleasure had also derived from the teacher's and students' shared oppositional stance to hegemonic social structures, in this case, to patriarchal ones. Now the feminist film criticism class still has an oppositional curriculum and some students who share that stance emotionally and intellectually, but it also has in it other students who defend the status quo.

As a teacher, I have a faith that the students who take a class in feminist criticism want to study gender formation, but because some of the students take such a class now primarily to satisfy a general education graduation requirement, it is often

hard to move classroom discussion beyond the stage where everyone has to deal with the defensive attitudes of the few. Furthermore, the anger that I feel at women's oppression, theorized and detailed by the curriculum in an explicitly feminist course, sometimes becomes focused on those students whom I perceive as "recalcitrant." Over and over in women's studies classes, one male student can get a large group of women to attend to him for a prolonged period of time, just by his refusing to "get the point." As the feminist film criticism class has become one of the courses that meets the university's race/gender requirement, the class itself now contains and perhaps by its very subject matter heightens gender tensions common in society at large.

To continue the story about our local curricular changes, which may apply to others' experiences as well, my department, a telecommunications and film department, dutifully added a "race" course to the curriculum when asked to do so. At first, "Race and Representation" was taught as a national cinema course on African cinema or Latin American cinema, sometimes by a token instructor of color hired specifically to teach that course.

While making the videotape, IN PLAIN ENGLISH (see ad on p. 19), I became more aware of the educational needs of students of color. All of the students of color whom I interviewed had a profound analysis of institutional racism in higher education. Currently these students are leading a movement to have the university add another course to the current race/gender general education requirement, one that would be about contemporary U.S. race relations, the historical roots of U.S. racial discrimination, or the experiences of peoples of color in this country. Responding to their demands to have more courses that deal with the structural aspects of race in the United States, I decided to try to teach Race and Representation as a course with a broad scope, one that could serve both majors and non-majors, one that might interest both students of color and undergraduates who would be fulfilling their general education requirement through a "film" course.

What follows is a course file. The course draws 50 to 100 students, and it may become larger. It does not have a film rental budget, so I teach it using tapes from our collection, material I have taped off television, or tapes that I rent. The reading is put on reserve.

My basic presupposition is that such a course has to be entertaining, offering what Horace called *utile dulce*, sweet learning (I will explain more about this principle below). The course may evoke anger at racism or sexism but it should not fall into simple denunciatory rhetoric. Rather it should constantly raise issues about viewing pleasure and the variety of spectators' responses. It should have enough curricular material to teach from so that the students of color in the classroom will not have to teach others or represent their race.

Here is how the syllabus addresses the issue of classroom climate:

"While all the class is expected to partake of a general anti-racist attitude, the students — and the readings — will have different approaches to analyzing different film and television texts, so it is important to learn from each other in class discussion. Neither I nor any of you is an authority on all the ethnic minority groups in the

United States or on all the possibilities of mixed-race experience. However, just as women and gay people have a more direct understanding and lifelong experience of sexism, so too people of color in the class will have had a more direct experience of and understanding of racism. At any given moment, they may or may not wish to make that experience a part of class discussion; the choice will be up to the individual student. However, the students of color should not feel that they have the burden of 'educating' everyone else. There will be enough visual and written material presented in the class for everyone to learn something about race and representation. Making a congenial atmosphere in which to learn is something that we must collectively establish each time we meet."

In fact, it turned out that the members of the class generally respected each others' opinions. However, I had to firmly direct discussions so that racist opinions, when expressed, were contextualized and explicitly dealt with. As a teacher, the tension I felt teaching a polarized student body never disappeared, but it seemed much diminished at the points when the students had just seen a film and had a lot to talk about. It is from this perspective that I recommend to others who teach such a course to teach more from film and television texts than from written ones. The entertainment value of features, the quick wit of ads, and the argumentative structure of well-made documentaries provided a momentum and a common, recent viewing experience that this class needed.

In its structure, the course began with a consideration of entertainment television, then feature films, and then documentaries and news. We looked at an episode of the COSBY SHOW and watched clips from music television with black performers. We also saw Marlon Riggs' documentary about the history of blacks on prime time U.S. television, COLOR ADJUSTMENT. When I teach the course again, I will extend this unit and teach PURPLE RAIN, LA BAMBA or CROSSOVER DREAMS or THE MAMBO KINGS, material by Whoopie Goldberg, TRUTH OR DARE, and more music video with women of color. Many issues about gender, crossover, family, comedy and buffoonery are raised by television and by music-oriented feature films. One of my goals in teaching television at the beginning of the course was to get students to observe and analyze the complex relation between knowing that what they are seeing is racist or sexist and enjoying it anyway. As it turned out, however, my teaching the complexity of spectatorship was limited. It consisted of a few instances of having students write down and compare their viewing responses.

The most popular section of the course came from showing feature films and teaching simple aesthetic principles which could be applied to film viewing in general. DO THE RIGHT THING provides a fruitful discussion of character typeage and color symbolism. THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY and POWWOW HIGHWAY both critique heroism and the role of the glamorous male as the central character. The former film is useful as an example of the "reporter film" in which an outsider, a white middleclass investigator, enters into the "Third World" and provides a point of identification for the spectator.

POWWOW HIGHWAY (Jonathan Wacks, 1988) is a low budget comedy which is a loose adaptation of the David Seals novel by the same name. It gives students an exposure to some Native American worldviews through the vehicle of a buddy film,

in the road movie genre. Its main character, played by A. Martinez, has rejected many native traditions while living on the reservation and working actively for Indian rights. His comic sidekick, played by Native American actor Gary Farmer, seems childlike but pursues his vision quest to move into full adulthood. The film ingeniously uses natural western locales and intertextual references to the film genre of the western to satirize and reevaluate notions of the warrior and heroism.

DIM SUM (Wayne Wang, 1985), a lyrical film about a Chinese American family, dwells upon the small quiet moments in family life, especially in a mother-daughter relationship. It offers an opportunity to teach generic aspects of domestic melodrama and visual style, especially a compositional aesthetic sensitive to negative space.

What turned out to be most successful in this unit was the inclusion of feature films about/from all the major racial groups in the United States. Ironically, although some students of color privately expressed gratitude at not being put in the role of exemplars, most wanted to see films in class that were exemplars of their ethnic group's experience. I inferred this from classroom discussion and student writing, where the larger cultural themes raised by the film were what the students wanted to talk about most — the mixture of the traditional and the contemporary in Native American communities; police brutality against African Americans; issues in the Latino and Asian American communities of maintaining or losing one's language of origin; and in the Asian American community to claim an American identity as opposed to an Asian one (Kim 1987). Furthermore, the international students in the class were eager to see works by all the U.S. ethnic groups — Chicano, Native American, Asian American, and African American — since they often had experienced racism in the United States but had only seen media from a mainstream cultural perspective.

Teaching exemplary works, the positive images approach, has advantages but also severe limitations. However, the other issue I faced in film selection was that of representativeness, that is, the need to include works about and from each of the major racial categories in the United States. Students whom I interviewed for IN PLAIN ENGLISH specifically wanted curricular material about their racial group to be taught in a wide range of classes and not just in ethnic studies classes. They objected to the way that liberal teachers in the social sciences and humanities would give "one lecture on slavery or one day devoted to racism" — that day covering the experiences of all the ethnic groups except "white," the coverage of which took up 95% of the course.

Finally, cramming too much into ten weeks, I concluded with a section on documentary. I contrasted reportage and the news, in its form and as an institution, to the works and institutional position of independent media makers in the United States. For economic reasons, most media makers of color are independent producers, and for political reasons, many if not most are committed to making oppositional work. I presented and critiqued educational film style, PBS-documentary style, and the news format. Most effective here were contrasts drawn between Alan Parker's depiction of Japanese American WW2 internment in the feature, COME SEE THE PARADISE, Rea Tajiri's experimental documentary, HISTORY AND MEMORY, and Lise Yasui's FAMILY GATHERING. (In the future I would do a larger topic on films about the internment and include MITSUYE AND

NELLIE, a film about a Japanese American and a Chinese American poet, made by Allie Light) Finally, I showed my own tape, IN PLAIN ENGLISH, and discussed the genesis and life of a documentary video made within the context of local struggles for institutional change.

Many good readings exist on this topic, and in fact they led to the course's organization. However, it became clear to me that the students only crammed the readings to write an exam, and that most of their learning came from a direct experience of and consequent analysis of media just seen in class. Of the reading that was "digested," only the most directive and denunciatory essays were remembered and written about with either passion or clarity. In this area, the course completely failed to achieve one of the goals set out in the syllabus, which I cite here:

"Writings by film scholars of color will be part of our readings. The criticism read will be analyzed both for its point of view and as a type of criticism that you yourselves may want to read more of or to write. Such criticism varies from reviews in non-film newspapers and magazines to reviews in film journals to analytic articles about the larger issues of race and representation or political reflections on media and society. The writers do not all agree nor write on the same level of complexity. We will be looking at what arguments they present and how they back up their points."

In other words, the course effectively taught students something about film and television but it taught them little about film criticism. I attribute this to the elementary level of the course and its large size as well as to the syllabus' over-ambitious scope.

Because I am increasingly dissatisfied with the kind of learning that comes from doing reading on reserve (since teachers can no longer rely on course packets made available to students at copy stores), I am struggling with a way to test students and to teach them critical writing skills. In particular, they need good material on videotape to study and write about. The easiest topic to assign and the easiest for students to research, of course, is "Racism in (a Hollywood film)", since they can rent such films on videotape. However, that assignment does not achieve what I consider a major goal. I want students to study the work of independent film/videomakers of color. Students need to have the work available for repeated viewing so they can analyze it in depth. But with a no budget course in a school system facing 12% cutbacks in state support, the most desirable goal seems hardest to achieve.

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